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# ST IN THE CROWD

THE JOURNAL OF  
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# LOST IN THE CROWD;

OR,

Better Broke than Kept.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'RECOMMENDED TO MERCY.'

' Hushed on the angel's breast  
I saw an infant rest,  
Smiling upon the gloomy hell below.  
"What is the infant pressed,  
O! angel to thy breast?"  
"The child God gave me in the Long Ago."  
LORD LYTTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# LOST IN THE CROWD.

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## CHAPTER I.

‘Chaos of thought and passion, all confus’d,  
Still by himself abused, or disabused ;  
Created half to rise and half to fall.’

POPE.


‘WELL, my dear fellow, if you can reconcile your conscience to this kind of thing I have nothing more to say. I am perhaps, in such matters, stupidly prejudiced, but I must confess that in your place I should shun, as I would a rattlesnake’s bite, any entanglement with a “coloured” girl. This one is a glorious creature, no one can deny that, and people do say that owing to the state of the old Don’s finances, he would be not unwilling to sell—under the rose, of course, because of public opinion, which is so powerful



here—not only St. Etienne, but all his live stock to boot. All the same, I advise you and I do so strongly, having some experience—from reliable hearsay—in such matters, to have nothing whatever to do with this dark-eyed Claudine.'

The utterer of this very sage counsel is the older and the least well-looking of two men who are leisurely walking their horses along the banks of a sluggish canal—one, too, on which, be it said, an occasional alligator is seen to disport itself—that leads from the City of New Orleans to Lake Ponchartrain. The 'shell road,' as it is called, is during the later hours of the day the favourite resort of the 'Crescent City' *gandins*, and in the thick of the crowd—and proceeding at the marvellous rate of trotting which no one but an American, seated in a 'sulky,' has the skill to persuade even a trained trotting horse to achieve—is a long-limbed, whiskerless Yankee, endowed with hollow cheeks and a 'goatee' beard, who probably flatters himself that he is about to have a 'good time' with a beautiful, dark-eyed girl, in whose proximity he has checked his horse, and who is, in company with an older lady, walking slowly under the shelter of the budding trees.

'There he is!' ejaculates the younger of the two equestrians above mentioned. (His name is



D'Arcy Mainwaring, and he is about as favourable a specimen of a well-looking, well-bred young Englishman as has ever—whether in pursuit of pleasure or of business—found his way to ‘the States.’) ‘The brute! How I should like to punch his head! The way that those Yankee fellows treat the prettiest girls in the South, for the simple reason that the little darlings have a few drops of coloured blood in their veins, makes my own positively boil with indignation.’

‘As is often much too plainly to be seen,’ his more sober-minded companion, who is known to the world as Eustace Fielden, drily rejoins, ‘and it is for that very reason that I advise you to “make tracks from Orleans” with as little delay as possible. These lantern-jawed Northerners are quite as ready with their six-shooters and their bowie-knives as the Southerners are, and although they may treat these ill-fated women as only brutes could do, they are none the less ready to fight for the possession of them. Now this Claudine Montes——’

‘Oh, by Jove! Don’t speak of her! That is, if you expect me to take your advice. If ever there lived a woman whose beauty is capable of driving a man mad, that woman is Claudine Montes. Such a mere child, too, as she is!

Scarcely sixteen ! Oh, come on, Fielden !' he adds, after a pause. 'I can't stand that ;' pointing, as he says the words, with his riding-whip in the direction of a huge ilex tree, beneath the shade of which the obnoxious Yankee, who has descended from his vehicle, is—with the most offensively familiar air—evidently 'paying his court' to the lovely octoroon.

Eustace Fielden, who with the last speaker, and his own pleasant, energetic wife form the trio who some four months previously took steam from Liverpool to New York, is by some fifteen years the senior of his friend. He is a clever man, but one who, as his intimates declare, is too full of 'crotchets' for any real and tangible advantage to be reaped from any of the thousand and one financial projects which are constantly floating through his brain. He is, in truth, at heart a speculator, and is, moreover, possessed of a confidence so unshakable in his own judgment, that to attempt any subversion of the same is tolerably certain to prove labour thrown away. 'Happy is the man who is cock sure !' So wrote, some years ago, a clever essayist in a bitter weekly paper ; and truly, a better exemplification of the truth of the saying could not, than in the case of Eustace Fielden, be found. So blinded, indeed, was he by the rose-tinted motes, the existence of

which in his own eyes he was ignorant, that even when glaring non-success followed on his schemes, it failed him to perceive that any mistake or error of judgment on his own part had occasioned the result which, by men capable of cooler reasoning, and possessed of more business-like habits of thought, had been accurately foreseen.

Mr. Fielden's unlucky shipwrecks—often repeated as the world in which he lived well knew them to be—did not in the slightest degree militate against a certain well-developed habit on his part; the habit, namely, of giving both well-meaning as well as indisputably excellent advice to others. His experience of life and of 'the world' was considerable; and in spite of the dogmatism which marked his character, he was far from being generally unpopular. It is just possible that could he with truth have pointed to himself as an example of successful adventurers, his counsels to his friends would less frequently, as was undoubtedly the case, have fallen unheeded on the tympanums of his listeners.

As regarded the pecuniary 'means' of the fellow-travellers, they differed as greatly in amount as they did in the several sources from which their incomes were derived. Mr. Fielden's father had been for many years what is generally

known as a 'commission merchant' in the cotton trade. Twice in every year, both of his early and maturer manhood, did he, in pursuit of his lucrative calling, cross the Atlantic Ocean, from Liverpool to the 'Crescent City,' and back again. In spring-time and in autumn, when the sea was calm as a sleeping lake, and eke in blustering, late October, 'when the stormy winds did blow,' and when, maybe, 'dead lights'—suggestive words—were throughout the entire voyage called into use on board the gallant ocean steamer, the money-maker went his way. Mrs. Fielden, the mother of our present travellers, had sojourned—during the comparatively healthy months of the year—in New Orleans. A Scotchwoman by birth, she had imbibed, during her long residence in the Southern States, not only a strong predilection for the institution of slavery, but an intense and insurmountable prejudice against the 'coloured races.' This prejudice, which her husband fully shared, was bequeathed, together with a very considerable fortune (accumulated, as I need not add, by means of slave labour), to their son Eustace.

At the time of which I write, the 'Crescent City' was in the height of its prosperity, and 'the Institution'—as the monstrous evil of slavery has universally, in the Southern States been called

—appeared to have a long lease of life before it. Eustace Fielden—the owner of a valuable though not extensive landed property in England, known by the name of Herondale, was, at the period of his visit to America, about forty-five years of age. He had left two fair young daughters at home, and his wife was about six years his junior. Their fortune had once been, as I have said, considerable; but it had become, through its owner's rashness, greatly diminished : and it was partly in the hope of retrieving, by more successful operations, the failures of the past, that he, for the first time in his life, visited the great Republic which his father had so well known, and the resources of which he had turned to such good account. Mrs. Fielden, although she detested 'the sea,' and had been for some time in what is called 'delicate health,' resolved to accompany her husband. From a very early period of her married life she had become nervously aware of his dangerous leaning towards speculation, and of the almost impossibility of turning him aside from any project, however wild, which had once taken form and substance in his brain. Her life, poor woman, had been passed in the vain endeavour to make a sanguine man, whose talents for sophistry were unfortunately remarkable, listen to reason ; and those who were acquainted

with the frequency and hopelessness of the task which she had attempted, did not greatly marvel that in the hard battle of life she had become, in outward appearance at least, somewhat worn and battered.


‘I am terribly afraid,’ this much-tried woman had said only the day before to their young companion, who, he being the son of a near neighbour, and a so-called ‘friend,’ was ever ready to sympathise with her in her troubles, ‘that Eustace really *will* persist in this mad scheme. Only conceive the folly of it! To become a slave-owner! To possess an island in the Gulf of Mexico, to trust entirely to that sharp-witted Yankee, Tollfree, as his agent out there, whilst we—— Oh, my dear Mr. Mainwaring, it is too frightful! It will take all our remaining funds to make up the purchase-money. There is but one opinion, both on the part of Mr. Stedlett the lawyer, and everyone who has been consulted, regarding the madness of the act; and yet it would be easier, I very believe, to move the St. Charles Hotel than Mr. Fielden from his purpose to become the owner of St. Etienne.’

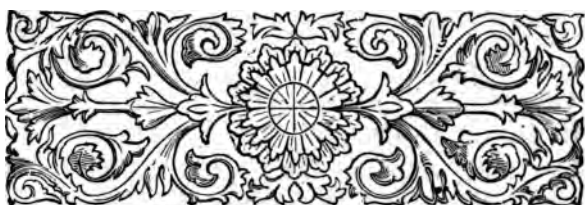
It was thus that the speculator’s harassed wife expatiated to her fellow-traveller on the perils which only too truly threatened to overwhelm her; and he, had he been so minded, might in his turn have held forth to her upon the mar-

vellous fact that Eustace Fielden had been lately preaching to him against the commission of a deed which, whilst it was in itself a sin against morality, would probably entail upon its perpetrator a far inferior amount of punishment than must perforce follow on the sermoniser's adherence to *his* resolves. For Eustace Fielden would—there would be little doubt on that score—become eventually, should he persevere in his scheme, a ruined man. By the English law the holding by a British subject of any property that is dependent on slave-ownership is punishable as an act of felony. Everything, even to the uttermost farthing that is possessed by the delinquent, is sacrificed to that great money-snatcher, the 'Crown;' and he is condemned, if found guilty, to penal servitude for life. That such were the pains and penalties attendant on the discovery of the deed which this eccentric Englishman was so bent on perpetrating, he was thoroughly well aware. To men of his stamp, however, a spice of danger to be incurred, adds to, rather than diminishes, the zest with which they 'go in' for an adventure. Like many another man who is himself the soul of honour, Mr. Fielden was slow to suspect the capacity of another for acts of treachery and fraud. In the canny New England farmer, a descendant, as the man averred, from one of the 'Pilgrim fathers,' he placed an amount



of confidence which his friend pronounced to be positively touching. 'How was it possible,' the would-be speculator indignantly remarked, 'that a man so hospitable, so open-handed, and so truly a religious character as was Tollfree *could* be the scheming rascal which Mainwaring and his Southern acquaintances would have him (Fielden) to believe?' Why, could they possibly forget the warm welcome which he had given them to his New England farm? The modestly attired, well-behaved young daughters waiting at table on the guests; and then, in the quiet evening-time, the unostentatious gathering of the family at prayers, with the 'May Flower' relics around them, and a pleasant flavour of old traditions mingling with the busy New World life—all these things together, to say nothing of the charmingly motherly aspect of excellent Mrs. Tollfree, did, in Eustace Fielden's opinion, absolutely preclude the possibility of the New England farmer turning out a traitor. Of course, it was everyone's duty to be cautious; but for his part, he would as soon suspect himself of rascality, as believe that their farmer-host at peaceful, plentiful West Hill Farm was capable of offences against loyalty and honour. Time would show, and time would prove that he (Fielden) was, as usual, in the right.





## CHAPTER II.

‘Hadst thou but known the inly touch of love,  
Thou wouldst as soon go kindle fire with snow,  
As seek to quench the fire of love with words.’


*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

A WEEK sped by, and the warm Southern sun had expanded the bright green buds (as if by magic) of the closely-growing trees which, with their roots in standing waters, shade and render pleasant the *raised* shell road which, but for artificial means, could not be utilised as a causeway. Festooned from branch to branch, hung wreaths of ‘Spanish moss’ (*Tillandsia usneodes*), grey as an old man’s beard, and apparently—to the imaginative mind at least—not altogether useless as supports to the cotton-wood trees, which—leaning this way and that—are only saved from falling into the ‘dismal swamp’ by means of numbers, and the parasitical plants which cling from tree to tree.

The alligators, sleek and slimy, have come forth in multitudes to sun their terrible long bodies and voracious-looking mouths on the canal-banks. With the maternal instinct strong within them, they are greedy for carnivorous food, and woe to the *blanchisseuse* 'yaller gal' who, oblivious for the moment of their near neighbourhood, plunges, whilst following her vocation, her arm into the sluggish waters of the canal! Small chance of rescue will there be for her if those ferocious jaws once close upon her fragile limbs, for rarely has an alligator been known to loose his hold upon a captured prey.

D'Arcy Mainwaring, although he is greatly given to the weakness of falling in love, is, on the whole, by no means a foolish young man. He has recognised the wisdom of his friend's advice, and being prudently distrustful of himself, has avoided, during the past week, all opportunities of meeting with the beautiful octoroon. Now, Claudine Montes, besides being lovely, is a young person of tact and discrimination. It has not been solely for the acquirement of accomplishments that she has passed two years of her young life in one of the best schools in Paris. She has tasted of the 'Tree of Knowledge,' and if she has not thereby acquired the wisdom of refusing the evil and

choosing the good, she has at any rate gained a tolerable insight into her own likes and dislikes. Between the two men who have been, to borrow an American expression, 'running' during the past winter for the attainment of her affections, Claudine's choice has not for a moment vacillated. Woman's gift of instinct, one frequently more potential than is the boon of reason, would alone have initiated her into the immense *moral* superiority of D'Arcy Mainwaring over her Yankee admirer; but above and before this, there was the fact that the Englishman was not only by many degrees the better looking of the rivals, but that he enjoyed the inestimable advantage of being in Claudine's opinion that rare thing—a *gentleman*. 'A veray parfit gentil knight' was in her eyes the fair-haired young North-country squire, who, had *she* been in very truth a 'ladye' of high degree, could scarcely have been behaved to by him with greater deference and courtesy. Widely different in her respect was the habitual procedure of Mr. Jervis J. B. Shawfield, than whom there were few men in New York State who could, as he often boasted, be spoken of as rivalling him in wealth; and this being so, he, with the weight of his 'almighty dollars,' made sure—a circumstance which his demeanour plainly evidenced—of, in the first place, thrusting



the 'darned Saxon' out of the field; and in the next, of bending Claudine to his will. Meanwhile the familiarity of the purse-proud Yankee—his air *conquérant*, and his free indulgence, when in the octoroon's presence, of the habits, attitudes, and mode of speech which are characteristic of his countrymen, daily increased the distaste which his appearance, and the fact of his being that hated thing throughout the South, *id est* a 'Northerner,' had created in the young girl's mind.

When she first perceived a relaxation in D'Arcy Mainwaring's attentions—when he ceased to attend, as had been his wont, the quadroom balls, at which he had so often claimed her as his partner in the dance—when his eyes, instead of seeking those glorious ones, 'half languor and half fire,' which all too surely proclaimed the fact that in the veins of Claudine Montes no 'snow-broth' ran—when, I repeat, instead of watching for a glimpse of those shy, passionate orbs, he had more than once turned away his head, and riding or walking, as the case might be, past her, had made no sign of recognition, then the heart of the octoroon felt well-nigh near to breaking. Understanding nothing of the causes which had led to this sudden and, to her, most grievous change, Claudine being little more than a child

in years, and having been born and, alas ! 'raised' under the baneful influence of the slave-system, this passionate daughter of the sun was scarcely likely to bear, after the fashion of a well-trained and high-principled English girl, the burden of her sorrow. Patient endurance would, we may be tolerably certain, *not* be the fashion in which *she* would endeavour to 'conquer her fate.' 'Quiet to quick spirits is a hell ;' and Claudine's spirit, stirred to its depths by the love-whispers which handsome D'Arcy Mainwaring had breathed into her ear, by the tender pressure of his hand, and by the winning softness of his high-bred manner, was unfortunately far too 'quick' to remain inactive under her weight of woe.

As is the case with the majority of those greatly-to-be-pitied girls who, being the nameless offspring of wealthy white slave-owners, are sent to Europe for their education, Claudine, on her return to New Orleans, and to her mother's roof, was but ill prepared for the state of things which it was her bitter lot to face. The 'establishment' of old Don Montes di Pinto, of which Claudine's mother, a still handsome, and eke a hot-tempered quadroon, was the nominal head, might have done duty as a veritable 'Fair Rosamond's' retreat, so completely was it embowered in the rich growth of tropical vegetation,

which in the shape of spreading ilexes and big-leaved deciduous trees, on which hung wreaths of gorgeous flowers, half concealed the suburban cottage from the gaze of the curious. A wood-built, shingle-roofed house it was, and painted, even to the chimneys, white; but so clothed and covered was it by 'creeping *plants* innumerable,' that nought save the soft, bright colouring of leaves and brilliantly tinted blossoms met the eye.

It was in this fair bower, for fair in truth it was, that 'Madam Anastasy' (usually known as 'Stasy Joyce') had been, during some seventeen years, located. Her progeny, which were numerous, were together with herself, fed and clothed—*tant bien que mal*—at the expense of impecunious Don Montes de Pinto, who at the period of which I write, he having come well-nigh to the end of his tether, was seeking (his agent in the business being Mr. John B. Toll-free, of West Hill Farm, N. England) to dispose to the best advantage of his 'valuable property' in the Gulf of Mexico. The said property consisted of an island, utilised as a sugar plantation, together with some seventy negroes, boys and girls (a slave, be it known, let his age be what it may, is rarely, if ever, spoken of in Louisiana as a *man*); and it was this 'desirable

property,' by name St. Etienne, which Eustace Fielden, in spite of the adverse counsels of his friends, has set his mind upon purchasing.

Women in the South, let their origin be what it may, do undeniably both 'age,' and 'fatten' early. Yellow-complexioned Anastasy Joyce, who at thirty-three, *looks* forty, and is something very like a mountain of flesh, has however her revenge in the person of the once lovely creole, Donna Montes, whose pearl-white skin is stretched over globe-like cheeks, and who, as 'Mistress Stasy' delights to hear, fills up, so wide-spread is her person, the entire front of her opera-box—an opera-box, too, on the first tier of the grand St. Charles's Theatre, the which theatre, like every other in the city, Stasy, she being of slave origin, is not permitted to enter. Now, Claudine, whose eyes were of the deepest grey, shaded by curved black lashes, and whose hair, wondrously abundant, was of palest brown, gold-tinted by the sunbeams into warmth and light, had been, when in Paris, more than once taken by some of her school friends' parents to the opera; and when there the girl must have been either blind or stupid (and this child was neither), had she failed to notice that at no box in all the crowded house were *lorgnons* so persistently levelled as at the small upper one in which she



and Eugénie la Lande were—chaperoned by her friend's grey-haired father—seated. She had no objection—what woman has ?—to being admired ; but she was withal a proud girl, and even admiration, if displayed coarsely, and without tact and discrimination, offended her. How much worse then was it with this daughter of a degraded race, when, in that shingle-roofed, verdure-covered house amongst the ilexes—that house in which her mother, a laughter-loving dame whose dark head was covered with a many-coloured *madras*, and whose white teeth were ever in full display, presided as mistress, she (Claudine) found herself compelled to listen to such repulsive 'love-making' as the gallant white city *gentlemen* deemed fitting for the ears of an octoroon.

Ah ! how bitterly, in the inmost recesses of that pure heart of hers, did she feel her degradation, when men of the type of J. B. Shawfield—men who could never be made to understand the amount of loathing which their words inspired—ventured to pour into her ears, whispers which, though they were by her but dimly comprehended, were nevertheless, as her sure woman's instinct warned her, poisonous and vile. And she had no protectors ! The male relatives of coloured girls—their brothers, friends, or maybe

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cousins, never formed a part of those assemblies in which the more favoured portion of the masculine sex came to appraise, even as they might do a horse or dog, the *thing* they wished to purchase. And the mother? Well, it was the old, old story. One which, having been commenced more than two centuries before, was still, alas ! told every day in the land of which slavery had sapped the moral life-springs. Anastasy Joyce, with three lovely daughters, of whom Claudine was the eldest, by her side, saw no other future for them than that which at their age had been hers. In that future, the woman, with her hopelessly blunted moral sense, perceived no shame. Their beauty was the fortune of the hapless girls, on whom there could dawn no brighter lot than to be the white men's mistresses ! It was, in most instances, a case of sale and barter, and the mother of coloured girls was apt to look with no favourable eyes on a daughter who, having listened to the silent voice which to her inmost heart whispered that she was human, turned a deaf ear to the coarse, crapulous language in which it was customary for so-called American 'gentlemen' to address the slave-girls of the South. As many as they are often unguessed at are the causes which can oblige a woman to listen to language from a

man's lips which her very soul abhors ; and all the while the utterer—dull, self-deluded prattler !—imagines, because she dares not do battle in her own defence, that he has succeeded in rendering himself agreeable to his intended victim.

‘ Have you not mark'd a partridge quake,  
Viewing the towering falcon nigh ?  
She cridles low behind the brake,  
Nor would she stay, nor dares she fly.’

It is hardly possible to imagine a more striking contrast than that which D'Arcy Mainwaring—to wooers such as these—presented. When he and his two friends landed from a Mississippi steamer at New Orleans, he, being solely on pleasure bent, had nearly reached his thirtieth year. Nature, as I have previously said, had, in the matter of personal advantages, been very bountiful to him. In mental qualities, also, he was by no means deficient ; not that he was gifted with any remarkable conversational powers, but in society, and when excited by the flow of lively talk going on around him, he could mingle to good purpose with the flashing stream, and many a quaint remark and apt quotation—for D'Arcy professed an admirable memory—had gained for him a reputation, not only for ‘ humour,’ but for talent. But the chief fascination—the *glamour*, if I may so call it, by which the hearts of women were

drawn towards this man, lay in the union of force with gentleness, and of reckless courage with a refinement of speech and manner which in him were especially noticeable. As regarded his conduct towards the weaker sex, it may be said of him that although he enjoyed the equivocal reputation of being unsparing in his pluckings of many a frail, bright blossom, yet so careful was he of the good names of the many reckless ones who deemed the world well lost for D'Arcy Mainwaring's love, that *Sub silentio* might have been the motto on his shield ; whilst those who were acquainted neither with his temperament nor his career, might—so remarkable was his reticence—have deemed him a very tyro in the art of Love. During the months when he had been a not backward admirer of lovely Claudine Montes, he had never—and in that fact lay, in part, the secret of his fascination—uttered a syllable that was calculated to call a blush into her cheek. He, in short, possessed the talent of so softening and idealising all which in human nature is *somatéc* and material, that the grosser particles of a man's corporeal being seemed, as it were, absorbed by him in a Sybaritish delicacy which enhanced the charm of passion's wildest turbulence.



### CHAPTER III.

‘Young men *think* old men are fools ; but old men *know* young men are fools.’—CHAPMAN : *All Fools*.

‘WELL ! of all the wild-geese chases I ever was engaged in——’

‘For “goose” read “alligator ;” while as for the bird—what can I say ? Why, simply this : I think that one’s best hope is that he may not—this time, at least—he caught.’

‘And *have* you any hope ? This expedition, in which there is assuredly no pleasure, looks terribly like business ;’ and the speaker, gazing down from the slight vantage-ground which the half-deck of a ten-ton river steamer affords, adds, with an air of intense disgust to his companion, who was no other than Eustace Fielden’s wife : ‘What could that fellow Tollfree possibly have meant by saying there was what he called “good accommodation” on board this wretched boat ? There is literally no place for you to sleep in——’

‘Excepting the *ingine*-room. You forget that spacious apartment altogether——’

‘Spacious indeed! about eight feet square, smelling of rancid oil, and in which only a small woman like you could stand upright. If I had only known of it——’

‘We should have certainly avoided trusting ourselves on board the *Picayune*; and in that case, dear Mrs. Mainwaring, who would have looked after Eustace? But hush! here he comes, and he must not suspect that we are in a plot against what he imagines will be so greatly to his future advantage as the purchase of St. Etienne——’

‘He is like a child,’ murmured D’Arcy impatiently. “Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw.” For my part——’

‘Come, come! there is not so very much to choose between you two. There are straws and straws, and when once the tickling process commences, one man, it seems to me, is very like another. Well, Eusty,’ addressing her husband, who just then sauntered aft towards the steersman—the latter, together with the engineer, forming the entire crew of the *Picayune*—‘how about the weather? Do you think we shall have more rain? I hope not, for shelter is a somewhat scarce article on board this boat.’

She spoke—as it becomes a good and prudent wife who fancies she sees a cloud upon her husband's brow, to do—cheerfully, and in a pleasant voice. The prospect of a two or three days' voyage, as the case might be, in this bargelike vessel, amongst a confusion of *crisscross* water-lanes, swarming with alligators, and redolent of swamp-fever, was not agreeable; but Mrs. Fielden, being on a good purpose bent, determined to make the best of things. She even mustered a smile and a few courteous words when her *bête noir*, the robust New England farmer, addressed her with the volunteered information that he 'guessed she was the first European female who had ever set foot in the Attakapas.'

'The motive must be a powerful one, I should think, that could induce anyone to do so,' she said; and truly the aspect of things around her fully warranted the remark.

The muddy banks of the canal-like-looking water-ways, to which the barge found itself at times (so narrow was the channel) close enough on either side to brush against the long flaglike rushes by which the banks were fringed, are only a few inches above the surface of the unwholesome, stagnant-looking water through which the very small amount of power possessed by the *Picayune* propelled that miserable craft.

It was a source of wonder to the uninitiated that the steersman could, along those tortuous ways, so monotonously alike, and, apparently at least, without either 'mark' or 'bound,' guide his course aright; and D'Arcy Mainwaring, when he had for some time watched, when the noonday sun shone out, the hideous alligators basking on the mudbanks, and anon slowly floundering into the turbid, putrescent stream, gladly turned, for the refreshment of his thoughts, towards beautiful Claudine. She had described to him that voyage, one which, when a child, she had often, sorely against her will, been taken; for her horror of the slime-haunting alligators had been intense, and for nights after she had seen them wallowing in the mire, her dreams had been haunted, and her rest broken by their memory.

The poor little tender child, so delicate and so passing fair! Ah! could he but take her from her vile surroundings, from a land where insult was her daily portion, and where the fate which awaited her was so dark and cruel, what joy, what rapture would be his! By him she would be ever loved, protected, and revered; not a wind of heaven should visit her cheek too roughly, not a whisper of contumely or scorn should wound her ears; but alas! there was another side to the picture, a side which was indeed a 'seamy' and a



discoloured one, a side of which not a single rose-tint lighted up the gloom ; for D'Arcy could not hide from himself the fact that under no circumstances could he be induced to make the octoroon his wife. She was beautiful, accomplished, pure ; but with him, passionately as he loved and longed for her, the prejudices of 'caste' were too overpoweringly strong for even love to prevail against them.

Was he better, he might have asked himself, in this respect than the detested J. B. Shawfield, or any other of the dissolute, coarse-minded white men who, their name being Legion, 'went about like lions roaring after their prey,' 'seeking their meat' anywhere but heavenwards ? Their end and object was the same, that end being the destruction of the innocent ! Because in the one case the work was set about with gentle hands, and the poison administered was concocted in so refined and delicate a manner that the bitter was hidden by the sweet, the work was still the same, and the crime of moral murder none the less fatally committed.

D'Arcy Mainwaring, as he leant against the frail support of the engine-roof, and admired, not for the first time, the pleasant face of Eustace Fielden's still attractive wife, felt, humanly speaking, as certain as man could do, that the

day would come (provided his life were spared), when he too would crave the blessing of a well-trained, well-connected English helpmate. He was a scion of an ancient race; one whose family had held lands for generations past in one of England's fairest counties, and it behoved him to leave, when he should be gathered to his fathers, a son worthy to keep up the family name, and to maintain its dignity. Such were amongst D'Arcy Mainwaring's ideas of duty; and intermixed with these ideas was also the strongly marked one that the heir of Wrox-bourne Abbey must be of purer lineage than the nameless daughter of Don Montes di Pinto, the bankrupt slave-owner of St. Etienne. It was by working upon these ideas that his friend had more than half persuaded him to shorten his stay at New Orleans. 'Out of sight, out of mind' was the motto of a man whose own feelings had ever been well under his control, and D'Arcy's temperament was sufficiently warm and impressionable to warrant his well-wishers in the belief that Claudine's image would be soon effaced by that of some other 'she;' some daughter of Eve who, though perhaps less fair than the peerless octoroon, might yet possess the art to touch the wandering fancy of the English traveller.

As evening advanced, the little party were landed at their sleeping-quarters, the said quarters being a big shanty-like house, verandahed on all sides, and inhabited by the most hospitable of bachelors, and his 'servant' (they avoid as much as possible the use of the word 'slave' in the South), who exerted themselves to the utmost to ensure the comfort of the strangers. Cecile, the 'neat-handed Phyllis' who not only cooked but dispensed the poached eggs, and the beefsteak for the toughness of which the host apologised by saying that he had *only that morning shot the bull from which they were cut*, was a plump, good-looking 'yaller gal,' considerably under the age (forty, *id est*) at which period of life, and no earlier, it is considered by Roman Catholic authorities as expedient for 'Messieurs les Curés,' whose needs require a housekeeper, to admit a female 'stranger within their gates.' Mademoiselle Cecile's vocation in life had once been that of *coiffeuse* to the ball-going society of 'the City;' but having been purchased some twelve months previously by her present owner—a big, broad-shouldered speculator from Arkansas State—she had no choice but to follow him to his home amongst the swamps, where, on the solitary 'wild cattle run' on which her owner had located himself, Mademoiselle Cecile passed her time in in-

cessantly bewailing the hardness of her fate. She found a sympathising spirit in D'Arcy Mainwaring, who, in blissful unconsciousness of the lowering brows of his host, performed, from mere force of habit, his rôle of compassionating listener to the woes of beauty in distress.

'By Jove!' exclaimed Fielden to his wife, as the *Picayune*, with its human freight on board laboriously left the mudbank near to which it had been anchored, that fellow Mainwaring is too bad! Another four-and-twenty hours at that infernal place, and ten to one there would have been bloodshed; and all because Master D'Arcy cannot see a petticoat without trying his best to make its owner fall in love with him! If I ever saw hatred (which means murder, you know) in a human face, it was in that ruffianly Arkansas slave-dealer's when he caught D'Arcy and Mamselle Cecile whispering behind the door. If he gets safe out of this confounded country, all I can say is, that his luck will be infinitely greater than his deserts.'





## CHAPTER IV.

‘Sous le tranquille abri des citronniers en fleurs  
L’infortunée endort le poison qui la mine.’

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

‘WALL, stranger, I guess we can’t git along, any way we can fix it.’

‘Something gone wrong with your confounded engine, I suppose?’

‘Wall, I guess it’s something of that ’ere sort, and I ain’t got no proper cord aboard to fix the darned thing,’ said the skipper of the *Picayune*, as, scratching, in pensive mood, his head of unkempt hair, he in this perfunctory manner replied to Mr. Fielden’s questionings. The rate at which the vessel progressed had been gradually, as evening closed in, lessening; and at the time, somewhere about six o’clock, when the Englishman addressed to the ‘captain’ the very natural question of ‘What is the matter?’ the

advance of the *Picayune* was so slow as to be scarcely perceptible.

‘A pleasant night to spend in the open air!’ remarked D’Arcy, as a thick steamy fog gathered round the locality, one which low-fever and ague might well have claimed as their headquarters. ‘I hope, Mrs. Fielden, that you will not be the worse for this half-mad adventure—but, by Jove, take care!’ and before the individual thus warned was aware of his intention, he had seized her by the waist, and laid her prone upon the deck.

A position which was speedily adopted by the rest of the passengers, who probably owed their immunity from injury both to life and limb, not only to the slow rate of speed at which the *Picayune* was moving, but to the prompt lowering, as the skipper facetiously termed it, of their top-gallant-sails before the enemy; the said enemy being neither more nor less than a huge ilex tree (one of the few which in the course of their excursion had diversified the monotony of the scenery), and through the low growing branches of which the *Picayune*, now rendered altogether unmanageable, had slowly crashed its way. A long-drawn breath of relief, a ‘whew’ such as might have been emitted by an overtaxed walrus, escaped from the thin lips

of the lank-limbed New Englander, as, raising himself on his elbows, he looked back on the peril which he had escaped.

‘By the eetarnal,’ he said, ‘I reckon some of us would have had a bad time if we’d been caught up that ’ere tree!’ To which remark there being no dissentient voice, it became a question of how the night, with its unwholesome vapours, could best be whiled away. The free use of tobacco was decided by the gentlemen to be the most efficient remedy against malaria, whilst Mrs. Fielden had no other resource than to betake herself to the small, ill-smelling engine-room as a sleeping-chamber.

‘Never talk to me of a *soft* plank again,’ was her laughing remark on emerging the next morning at a suggestively early hour from her retreat. ‘How I pity poor prisoners who are condemned to pass their nights on a couch so hard as mine has been!’

‘It must have been terrible,’ remarked D’Arcy sympathisingly; ‘and I feel sure you will be ready for some hot coffee, which the skipper, engineer, steward, or whatever we may choose to call him, has made for us.’

‘Quite ready; and also to admit that our friend is the most considerate and courteous of men. Only fancy the generous offer which I

overheard him make to Eustace. It was in the matter of that small, and hateful-looking toilet appurtenance, which you and I remarked when we came on board, was probably one in general use. "I guess now, stranger, you'll like the loan of this 'ere article," he said. "It isn't every cuss I'll like to lend it to, and that's a fact; but I reckon you Britishers are kind o' particular about clean things."'

It was only by a smothered laugh (the generous proposer of the 'clean thing' in question being close at hand) that D'Arcy Mainwaring could show his due appreciation of this characteristic anecdote. He was tired, moreover, and out of spirits, for the fact that he was being carried farther and farther from the lady of his love became distressfully patent to him as the barge—damages having been in some rough and ready fashion temporarily repaired—proceeded slowly on her way towards the sea. And ah! as they neared the Gulf, and the fresh ocean breeze, bearing with it the subtle but delicious fragrance of the 'sad sea waves,' saluted his nostrils, the thought that ere long, thousands of miles of watery waste would roll between him and the girl whose lovely face he would in all probability never behold again, filled his heart with overpowering melancholy.



The channel gradually widened as they neared the low sandy shores of the Gulf of Mexico, and brightly blue shone the now slumbering waves as the vertical sun blazed down upon the tranquil waters. D'Arcy Mainwaring, with folded arms, contemplated the glowing scene which was opening out before him, and, having ascertained that they would soon come in sight of the low-lying island of St. Etienne, his eyes were fixed on the spot where he could soonest catch a glimpse of Claudine's earliest home.

Suddenly an exclamation arose of 'There it is! There is St. Etienne!' and all eyes were turned towards a spot between them and the horizon, the which spot had the appearance of a barren sand-bank, long and low, rising slightly above the level of the sea. As they approached nearer, however, they perceived, not only that the apparently barren island was far from treeless, but that the said trees threw out and wafted across the waters the delightful odour of citron blossoms. It was a perfume which called back to D'Arcy's memory, with a strange mixture of pleasure and of pain, the garden—so redolent of orange-flowers—in the midst of which stood Anastasy Joyce's verandahed house. A house—well! just such an one as *that* was the tenement which the next moment became visible above the

trees—a cottage, shingle-roofed, and with what the travellers were informed were sugar-boiling buildings, standing within a couple of stones'-throw of the wooden walls of the dwelling-house.

'There's a boat putting off in the creek there, I guess,' said the Yankee, who was surveying the scene through one of the least serviceable of ship's glasses. 'I reckon it's the old Don himself;' and he handed the telescope to his elder passenger as he spoke. 'It isn't much besides fowls and eggs that they have to eat in these diggings, but Don Ribiera will give us of the best he has;' and having so said, Mr. Tollfree suddenly doffed his broad-brimmed Panama hat, and waved it frantically towards the boat, which, rowed by four stalwart negroes, was now rapidly nearing the barge.

D'Arcy Mainwaring, as the proprietor of these swarthy human beings stepped on board the *Picayune*, looked with scrutinising eyes at the father and *owner* of Claudine. It was the first time that he and Don Ribiera had found themselves in each other's company, and, if the truth must be owned, he found some little difficulty in believing that the yellow-visaged, bloated old man, with his pendent cheeks and sensual lips, could by any possibility be the parent of that queen of beauty whom, in the Crescent City,

he (D'Arcy) had left behind him. The old fellow was very courteous, however, as became a denizen of his country; and the amount of hand-shaking and introductions which, after the Yankee fashion, took place after his advent was a 'caution.' After this ceremony had been duly gone through, the landing was effected, and the entire party were conducted through an avenue of citron-trees, from behind which many a laughing coloured face, from palest yellow to deepest, shiniest black, was seen to peer, to the bungalow-like domicile which, during his residences on the island, was occupied by the Don.

The appearance amongst the coloured population of St. Etienne of a white European lady, was an evident cause of wonderment to the female portion of the slaves; and no sooner was Mrs. Fielden left for a short time by her male companions to recover in quiet from her fatigues, than troops of women and girls broke uncereemoniously into her apartment, approaching far nearer to her person than was agreeable, and entreating her in very mongrel Spanish, not—when she became the 'mistress'—to have them flogged. It was in vain that the wearied traveller endeavoured to make them understand that neither she nor her husband had any intention of purchasing the Don's sugar plantation; in vain

too, for awhile, that she entreated them to leave her to her repose; and it was not till a gentle voice—after a slight tap had been given to the framework of the window—said, in the prettiest of French accents, ‘*Bonjour, madame,*’ that the poor lady saw any chance of driving away her tormentors.


Drawing aside a thin muslin curtain, the Englishwoman looked into the broad veranda by which the house was surrounded, and there saw, standing shyly on one side of the wide window, and with her lovely face half hidden by the creeping plants that hung in festoons from the roof—the object of D’Arcy Mainwaring’s untiring worship! The girl came forward at once, a soft carnation colouring her delicately rounded cheeks, and with a graceful obeisance, worthy of her Parisian training, she expressed in French her deep regret at the annoyance to which ‘*Madame*’ had been subjected. *Qui s’excuse, s’accuse*, is, as all the world knows, a time-honoured proverb, and its truth was never better exemplified than on the present occasion, when Claudine, fearing—and that not without reason—the quick-sightedness of the bright-looking English lady, said hurriedly :

‘*C’était avec l’idée d’éviter pour madame quelques-uns des inconvénients qu’elle aurait*

malheureusement à subir ici, que j'y suis venue avec mon père. 'The voyage,' she continued, still speaking in French, 'must, I fear, have been very unpleasant, and the servants here are so much left to themselves, that they are often rude and troublesome. I greatly wish, madame, that I could sooner have rid you of their importunities.'

She is leaning lightly against the window-sill, one of her small hands resting on the woodwork, and her soft, gazelle-like eyes rather avoiding than seeking those of her new acquaintance. Mary Fielden was one of the last women living to think lightly of the sin of tergiversation, that offence being in all its branches especially obnoxious in her sight; nevertheless, when the offender had, as in the present instance, called up her woman's cunning in defence of her maiden dignity and pride, the kindly English matron found no difficulty in discovering extenuating circumstances where a sterner judge of character and conduct would have perceived no shadow of excuse for the uttering of what she, with ample reason, believed to be a falsehood.

'You are very good,' she rejoined, 'to have taken so much trouble on my account;' and the spice of irony which accompanied the words was so delicately mixed that Claudine discovered it



not. 'My visitors were somewhat numerous, certainly,' she smilingly added; 'but we must remember, in their excuse, the monotony of their lives, and how rare a sight, an Englishwoman, in a seal-skin hat and jacket, must be to them! Do you spend much of your time here? This island—pardon me for saying so—can hardly, I should imagine, be an agreeable residence for one so young, and allow me to add, so attractive as yourself.'

The blush and smile which followed on this little compliment were still lingering on the octoroon's fair face when steps were heard approaching, and in another moment D'Arcy Mainwaring, whose interest in sugar manufacturing was far from being of an engrossing description, suddenly emerged from a group of citron-trees that stood in close proximity to the house.

The first object which met his gaze was Claudine, and that 'phantom of delight' having once beamed upon his fascinated vision, he looked no farther afield. Whether or not the 'phantom' had been (for he had caught the murmuring of tongues) holding sweet converse with her own fair self, he stayed not to inquire. Eustace Fielden's sensible and large-hearted wife might possibly, for aught he knew, or indeed at that moment cared, have been listening to

words which, like 'music spoken,' had fallen from those exquisite lips; there *might* be a thousand curious eyes watching him from out the shelter of that broad-leaved, climbing-plant-covered veranda, but what were they to him? Claudine, and she alone, was (*just then*) his world, and, springing forward, he clasped her in his arms.

'My own, my beautiful one!' he murmured, as he held her closely to his heart; but the girl, with paling cheek and half-averted head, whispered the faintly uttered words:

'Laissez-moi! Soyez généreux. Nous ne sommes pas seuls.'





## CHAPTER V.

‘Friendship ! mysterious cement of the soul !  
Sweet’ner of life ! and solder of society !’

BLAIR : *The Grave.*

‘ I FEEL greatly honoured by the message of madame ! If she had not had the kindness to send little Bella for me, I should never have had the courage to present myself again before my father’s guest.’

At the time when these meekly sounding sentences were falteringly spoken, the little party of travellers had been three days at St. Etienne, and during that period had been located, much to Mrs. Fielden’s satisfaction, in a separate and smaller dwelling-house than the one which was occupied by Don Ribiera and his family. A distance of about three hundred yards lay between the two tenements, which were of similar structure, built of pine ‘lumber,’ and very scantily furnished. Their food had consisted of eggs and



oysters, together with *gombo* soup, dough *dodgers*, and eatable, though tasteless fish.

Mr. Fielden's time and attention had been so taken up by business connected with his intended purchase, in studying the process of sugar-making, and in gaining information as to the best method of treating, and keeping in order the eighty human chattels which (provided that he had his way in this matter) were shortly to become his property, that he paid comparatively little heed to the fact that the object of his friend's 'insane' attachment was in such dangerous proximity to his quarters.


'You let them alone,' he, in the retirement of their chamber, said to his wife. 'No good will come of any more talking. Enough has been said, and Mainwaring is old enough, or the devil's in it, to take care of himself.'

Apparently the spirit of evil thus lightly and in conventional fashion evoked, did happen to be 'in it,' for Mr. Mainwaring, by the mere fact that he sought every opportunity of meeting with the octoroon, afforded ample proof that the capability of taking care of himself was a gift which—*pro tem*. at least—was denied to him.

Mrs. Fielden, although the cares and anxieties attendant upon her husband's contemplated folly were pressing heavily upon her spirits, could not, and that on more accounts than one,


view without feelings of the deepest regret, the evil which now, alas! appeared to her to be inevitable. She had known D'Arcy from his boyhood. Her husband's estates, now, unfortunately, as I have said, greatly diminished in extent, were in the same county as those of the wealthy young owner of Wroxbourne Abbey, and from the time when the latter, then a young lad under tutelage, first made the acquaintance of Eustace Fielden's wife, the kindly, genial chatelaine of Herondale was adopted by D'Arcy as that rarest of earthly blessings—a friend for life.

He had been a posthumous child, and his mother, albeit a woman possessed of the highest principles and most exalted sense of duty, nevertheless failed signally in acquiring the influence over her son which only entire confidence between parent and child is calculated to produce. And the reason for her failure was simply this. She was deficient in the first and best quality which a woman and a mother can possess—the gift, that is to say, of *tenderness*. That she loved her fatherless son with a true and righteous love there could be no doubt; but equally true was it that, with the best intentions, she was as little fitted for the task of guiding the steps of that boy aright, as if she



had been one of the 'careless women' who leave to chance the sacred mother's duty of training a young child in the way that he should go. Unfortunately both for the mother and son, the latter was of a disposition to require directly contrary treatment from the one which both her nature and peculiar sense of right pointed out to Lady Arabella Mainwaring as the one best calculated to be successful with her boy. He was a sensitive, impulsive little fellow, keenly alive to, and withal grateful for kindness shown to him, but equally prompt both to understand, and to resent an injury, or an affront. The boy's character was one which Lady Arabella had found it impossible to fathom; but with the inherent dislike of human beings to disbelieve in their own infallibility, she steadfastly adhered to her own preconceived notions of little D'Arcy's temperament and disposition, and utter failure was, as I before said, the unfortunate result.

The friendship of a married woman for a young man ten years her junior may prove either a blessing, or the contrary to a lad who—as was the case with D'Arcy Mainwaring—had early found, what I may call, a second, and a more congenial home elsewhere than under the maternal roof. In the present instance, gain, and only gain, to the owner of Wroxbourne had




followed on his intimacy with his Herondale neighbours and on the influence which the mistress of an especially agreeable country house had obtained over him. Very pleasant, as well as innocent, were the days which he passed at Herondale. *There* he was as secure from harsh rebuke as he was from the mortification—so keenly felt as such by a sensitive lad—of being treated as though he were still in leading-strings. In Mary Fielden's perfect tact, as well as in the gentle womanliness of her nature, lay in a great degree the secret of her success with one who, by less judicious management, might easily have become irritated into a 'character' of which it would with truth be said, that something worse than weakness was the cause of his shortcomings.

For this young fellow, high-spirited and generous though his friends knew him to be, and endowed moreover with many of the qualities which best do 'grace a gentleman,' was far enough from being one of the 'faultless monsters that the world ne'er saw;' and therefore it was that Mrs. Fielden, after he came of age, and took possession of his inheritance, trembled for the future well-being of her *protégé*. More than once had she, feeling her way very carefully, and as it were inch by inch, ventured upon

advice which had caused him at least to hesitate when he appeared to be on the point of treading some dangerous path; but now—now when the peril was indeed imminent—when the friend in whose welfare she, for many reasons, took the deepest interest—might be (for the clouds above looked black indeed) on the extremest verge of moral shipwreck, the anxious woman sadly felt her own utter inability to be of use. Of what avail, she told herself, would be her strongest, best-turned arguments against a single glance from the wondrous eyes of the girl by whose beauty D'Arcy Mainwaring had been made, for a while, a slave? And she, having thus arrived at the conviction that her words, however eloquent and well-inspired they might be, would be, in the matter of Claudine, wasted on the young girl's lover, wisely resolved to follow her husband's advice, and leave the fanatic worshipper to himself.

But there yet remained, she believed, a chance—a feeble one, it was true, but nevertheless a chance of averting both from D'Arcy and Claudine an evil, the consequences of which the English matron, shrinking as she did from even the distant view of sin, shuddered as she thought upon. She would see the girl herself. She would, if necessary, appeal to that still almost



childish thing (whose timid glances had, unintentionally, and yet effectually, concealed the fact that in her veins ran molten fire) in behalf of the man whose successful pursuit of her could only end in misery and ruin.

‘She shall know, poor child, from me the harm which such a connection would work for one like D’Arcy. She shall learn that his mother is a woman so proud and stern that she would never——’

‘Receive her as a daughter’ were the words with which Mrs. Fielden would, under less ambiguous circumstances, have concluded her sentence; but then, for at least the hundredth time, there arose in her mind the question as to whether, should D’Arcy’s suit prosper, Lady Arabella would ever be called upon to decide as to the advisableness, or otherwise, of receiving the octroon into her home and heart. This question, involving as it did such painful probabilities, filled her with dismay; and without allowing herself to dwell for another moment on a subject so fraught, not alone with difficulty and danger, but, alas! with sin, she sent off a small coloured girl named Bella with a note to Claudine, asking in kindly terms that young lady to favour her with a farewell interview.

Now Mrs. Fielden had never—excepting during

a momentary and passing glimpse, seen Claudine Montes, until the time, now just three days ago, when the octoroon's sudden appearance beneath the veranda had resulted in the short dialogue which was related in the last chapter. The English lady had been on that occasion greatly struck by the pretty shyness, not only of the girl's manner, but of the wonderfully expressive eyes which were kept almost constantly veiled by the dark, curled lashes that rested on her cheek; yet now, in this girl, when she, with the grace which was characteristic of her every movement, addressed her father's guest in the prettily-chosen words with which this chapter opens, the latter fancied that she could perceive a change. In what that change consisted, it would however have been hard to say. There was nothing that told either of self-assertion, or of any lack of befitting diffidence in the demeanour of the octoroon, and the experience of the older woman was far too limited, and her own temperament much too calmly pure, for any surmise of the truth to obtain a place within her thoughts. Even had she been cognisant of the fact, which in truth was not the case, that Claudine and D'Arcy Mainwaring had been during the last three days constantly in each other's society, the good woman's puzzle would

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have been to her equally unexplained. How was this mild British matron to recognise the truth that a few burning words whispered in a maiden's ear—a few lengthened pressures of hand or waist—and a few, well, of those blissful moments

‘*Qui s'enfuient comme un songe, et s'éteignent par degré,*’

would have been able to metamorphose that fair young girl so strangely?

And yet so it was; and when, after the first words of greeting were said, and Mrs. Fielden kindly offered her visitor a seat near herself beneath the veranda, whatever *shyness* existed between these two widely-different types of woman, was to be found, strange to say, in the wife and mother of thirty-five; for, alas! the maiden of sixteen had already learned to glory in the possession of a ‘white gentleman’s’ affections. *L’amour avait passé par là*, and had left its trace behind!







## CHAPTER VI.

‘ Mightier far  
Than strength of nerve, or sorrow, or the sway  
Of magic potent over sun and star,  
Is love, though oft to agony distrest,  
And though his favourite seat is feeble woman’s breast.’

WORDSWORTH.

‘ I AM sorry you should consider me so very formidable a person,’ said Mrs. Fielden, smiling kindly as she spoke, for her object was to set her companion at her ease. ‘ It pained me to leave the island without seeing you again, and I wished to bid you farewell in person. Do you remain here yourself, or are you returning shortly to New Orleans?’

At this question a flood of colour rose to the girl’s cheek, but it faded suddenly, leaving her as before, pale as a fair white rose.

‘ I do not know,’ she, with evident embarrassment, replied. ‘ It is a matter in which I have myself no choice;’ and as the words dropped

slowly from her lips, the petals of some gorgeous blossoms which she held were, all unconsciously, crushed between her trembling fingers.

‘Do you not care for flowers?’ asked Mrs. Fielden, who was watching the troubled, changeful face with interest, and who saw in the destruction that was in progress, an opening for the subject which she wished to introduce. ‘It is not always in the countries where they are especially profuse and beautiful that they are the most highly valued. In the south of Europe especially, there is even a prejudice against flowers, and this from an idea that their perfume is unhealthy, nay, even poisonous.’

‘Which some of ours really are,’ rejoined the octoroon, who gladly sought refuge in a topic which appeared likely to divert attention from herself. ‘There is, for instance, the euphorbia.’

‘Ah, I have heard of the blossom of that plant being as dangerous as it is lovely. A flower to be avoided by the prudent and the experienced. A flower, in short, against inhaling the scent of which you would of course warn a stranger; is it not so, my dear? You would not, I feel certain, see a fellow-being in danger of death without making an effort to save him from the consequences of his rashness?’

To these questions, Claudine, whose eyes were

still bent upon her lap, and whose colour, as had been the case a minute before, went and came after a fashion that was very lovely to the eye, made no reply ; and Mrs. Fielden, whose courage was rising with the occasion, spoke again :

‘ My child,’ she said, ‘ I think that you understand me. I think you know that only interest in your welfare prompts my words. Mr. Mainwaring, our friend—nay, do not start away from me, but listen whilst I talk to you of him and of yourself. He has doubtless spoken to you of his love, and has tried to gain in return your young and trusting heart. He has not meant, poor child, to injure you, but in doing this he has been very, *very* cruel.’

A murmured ‘ No, no, not cruel ! How could he be cruel to me ? ’ broke from Claudine’s lips ; but Mrs. Fielden, ignoring the confiding protest, continued the well-intended work she had begun.

‘ You do not need to tell me who am his friend—as in truth I wish, if you will permit me, to be yours—that Mr. Mainwaring is kind and good and generous. That he admires, nay, loves you, I neither wonder at, nor doubt ; but what—forgive me if I pain you—can be the end to you of such a love as his ? If you were to become his wife ; if you were taken home by him to the house where his mother, who is proud and cold

and stern, is awaiting his return with other hopes for him than that——’

‘He should become the husband of a slave girl!’ exclaimed Claudine passionately, and with a fire in her eyes which absolutely startled her mentor. ‘Madame, I understand you. The mother of this grand English gentleman who stoops to love one of my degraded race, would flout and scorn me if I were his wife; but if——’ and her bosom heaved convulsively, as though she were struggling to keep back words which would perforce be spoken; then, after a pause, and rising from her seat, she, in a voice which she strove in vain to render calm, continued: ‘And do you think so ill of me, madame, as to believe that even if the wish to marry me were to come into the heart of your English friend, I would accept such a sacrifice at his hands? I have known since I was a little child that it is thought shame for an American gentleman to marry the coloured descendant of a white man. The cruel tyrants whom the Indians call “pale faces” may make love to us, may buy us, may take us to their homes, and their children may call us “mother,” but to marry us is to break the law, and so——’

But here emotion choked her further speech, and Mrs. Fielden, greatly moved, could only with

gentle words endeavour to soothe and pacify her.

‘Poor child!’ she said, as she tenderly stroked the delicate hand, of which, in spite of opposition, she had succeeded in obtaining possession. ‘Your fate is indeed a hard one, or I should rather say, your temptations are terribly hard to combat. Still, if you have, as I hope, been taught your duty, you cannot fail to see that sin is certain to bring with it, sooner or later, its own punishment; and if——’

‘Pardon, madame,’ again broke in the octo-  
roon, ‘if I venture to remind you that you are speaking without knowledge of the subject which we are discussing. We are *slaves*; we are the property of the men who buy us. We have no choice but to commit what you call a “sin.” In your free country such sinning could not be; but I have lived in Europe, and I know from the English girls in the Paris Pension what a great family in their country would think of a coloured girl who was married by one of their relations, and brought home as his wife. No, madame, you may be easy in your mind about your friend. I love him’—and she threw back her small head, and looked almost defiantly at the English lady as she said the words—‘far too well to be his wife.’

Before her interlocutor, who was a good deal

taken aback by the suddenness with which the girl announced the state of her feelings, could make any suitable reply, Mademoiselle Claudine had, with the fleetness of an antelope, ran across the short space of sandy gravel which divided the veranda from the orange-grove beyond. As the last fold of her light muslin dress disappeared from view, Mrs. Fielden sighed audibly. 'Poor child!' she repeated more than once to herself. 'What can we do more to save her?' And then visions of home, and of the two bright English girls whom she had left there, rose up before her mind's eye, and a sigh of regret, still deeper than those which she had breathed for Claudine, broke from her lips; for Lilian, the elder and the fairer of the two, a tall, golden-haired girl of sixteen, had, the mother greatly feared, given a portion at least of her heart to D'Arcy Mainwaring, and it was this well-loved daughter's cause, as well as that of virtue (or, in other words, that of Claudine Montes) and of her lover, the young man, that the anxious parent had been defending.

Until her fears had been confirmed by this parting interview with the slave-girl, this excellent wife and mother had hitherto scarcely realised the full extent of the evil which was in progress. There was that in the countenance and demeanour of Claudine Montes which left no doubt upon the

mind of her kind adviser that the said young person was one who could not easily, either by threats or reasonings, be wrought upon to give up her lover ; whilst, as regarded him, the man who, weak and blamable although he had so often proved himself to be, Mrs. Fielden still regarded with affection, *his* only chance of safety lay in absence from the lady of his love.

They were on the point of leaving the island. A small schooner belonging to Don Ribiera, and used both as a trading-vessel and a pleasure-boat, was to convey the travellers, together with a cargo of Indian-corn, to 'the City.' D'Arcy had shown no intention of remaining on the island by separating himself from the rest of the party ; nor did he, during the progress of their voyage, betray any signs of being either conscience-stricken or self-absorbed. Smoking his cigarette, as he lounged with Mrs. Fielden on the deck of the *Juana*—the cargo of unthrashed Indian-corn lying about in heaps making a luxurious couch—he looked, in his bright, careless youth, so handsome, so high-bred, and so intelligent, that she, her wish being doubtless 'father to the thought,' could not bring herself to believe that such as he would ever bring disgrace upon the name he bore.

'He will never offer to marry her,' she said to herself, feeling at the same time well assured that,

should he prove capable of such an act of folly, Claudine's protestations against the act would turn out to have been but empty words: and that D'Arcy, whose moral and religious principles she knew to be so fixed and excellent, would ever show himself to the world in the light of a betrayer of the innocent, and a deceiver of the girl who trusted him, was a misfortune which this worthy but wholly unworld-taught woman would not allow herself to contemplate. D'Arcy was young and susceptible, and as yet his heart had never, as she believed, been really touched. From his present flow of spirits, as well as from the zest with which, at a later period of their return voyage, he entered into the sport of alligator-shooting, she drew the happiest auguries of his speedy return to a sane condition of mind.







## CHAPTER VII.

‘Then shook the timid, and stood still the brave.’

BYRON.

A YEAR and six months have elapsed since we left our party of British tourists on the level shores and amongst the hideous alligators of the Mexican *bayous*. It was spring-time then, and on the branches of the spreading ilex-trees the ‘blue birds’ and ‘Virginia nightingales’ made the woods brilliant with their varied plumage.

‘The bright rills

Were fringed with early blossoms ; through the grass

The quick-eyed lizard rustled, and the bills

Of summer birds sang welcome as they passed.’

But the scene has changed now. It lies still in the ‘New World,’ but the month is November; the trees are all but leafless, and visitors, who had travelled from far, as well as near to gaze upon the wonders of Niagara, have wended their

way to other and perhaps less wintry scenes. Amongst those who had been sojourning at the Cataract Hotel, but who now found themselves on board a 'pleasure' steamboat on Lake Ontario, was a young English gentleman, with his 'wife,' child, and servants. The lady was very young, and, had she not persistently hidden her face behind a thick veil, would doubtless have been pronounced by the few passengers who happened to be on board the *Ohio* to be singularly lovely. The weather was cold, and Mrs. Mainwaring (for such was the name that appeared on a card which the steward of the boat had pinned on the 'bed-place' she was to occupy) apparently preferred the fresh air of the lake to being enclosed within the wooden walls of the saloon. The gentleman by whom she was accompanied, and whose name she shared, had only lately recovered from a sharp attack of low fever, and was lying in a state of semi-delirium, and sorely prostrated by physical weakness, in his berth. The child, a boy, was a strikingly beautiful infant of about eight months old, and two coloured servants, a man and a woman, waited with attentive alacrity upon their *white* masters.

This little party had come on board at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, their place of embarkation having been a 'city' by name Lewiston;

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and they expected to arrive at the termination of their voyage by three o'clock on the following afternoon. The fates, however, had ordered differently, for scarcely had three hours sped by, when gathering clouds, and an ominous whistling through the deck-saloon, of the late autumn wind, proclaimed to the initiated the fact, that the 'trip' of the *Ohio* would, on this occasion at least, be not precisely what might be called a 'pleasure' one. The said vessel was in truth but ill-fitted to weather the terrific gales with which, during the autumn and winter months of the year, the inland seas of North America are often visited. Like many of the river boats, she stood, in consequence of having two *saloon*-decks, one above the other, dangerously high on the water; and as steamers of this description are only employed either for river traffic or for summer work upon the lakes, the captain of the *Ohio* turned, as the breeze freshened, and the waves increased in height and volume, more than one anxious glance to windward.

'Ugly weather, I guess, cap'en,' remarked a passenger in a blanket-coat, who looked the Arkansas slave-dealer from head to foot, and who was indulging without let or hindrance in the quid in which his soul delighted. 'I reckon this 'ere boat of yours wouldn't be much to speak

in a rale out-and-out gale o' wind. She's a mer vessel, she is, and one as ought enterun all-time.'

I calkerlate ye're about right there, stranger,' rered the captain coolly, as he in his turn ically demonstrated his belief in the poison-qualities of tobacco-juice. 'The *Ohio* ain't ng to run arter this trip. She's about the on the lake, I reckon, and by ——' and here rapped out an asseveration so startling in ingenious profanity that it required the lised nerves of an Arkansas slave-dealer to it unmoved—'I wish to Gord that I was again at Lewistown.'

As the day wore on, the force of the wind in- ed, until, by the time the short November closed in, it blew a perfect hurricane. The ers of a lake which, like that of Ontario, is dreds of miles in length and breadth, are y lashed into 'mountainous' and dangerous y, and the skipper of even a 'well-found' sea-going *craft* might find ample employ- for his skill and energy on such a night he one which found the top-heavy *Ohio* g battle with the raging winds and surging es of Lake Ontario. With the exception lot of male and darkies,' as they oken of by the and who were

stowed in the lower portion of the vessel (through and over which, for she was almost destitute of bulwarks, the waves rolled wildly), the only women on board were those whom I have before mentioned as forming a portion of the cabin-passengers. Claudine—for, as the reader has of course conjectured, it is she who has thus persistently hidden from prying eyes her fair face behind a veil—is crouching in an agony of terror in the saloon, and whilst the waters rage and swell, and every fearful heave of the top-hampered vessel seems destined to crush the fragile structure into atoms, he whose presence might, even in the midst of her hysterical alarm, have soothed her agitated nerves, is, in the hot fit of ague, lying all unconscious of the fact that his life and the lives of those who are dear to him are hanging upon a thread. His private cabin, or ‘state-room,’ as such sleeping-places are called on North American boats, had been twice tremblingly entered by the frightened girl, whose habit it had become to seek in every emergency, from D’Arcy Mainwaring, protection and support. He was, in truth, to the timid child, as a very tower of defence against the ills of life.

‘Oh!’ she had frantically ejaculated, as she seized within her own his burning hands, ‘we shall all be drowned! The steamer will be

dashed to pieces, and you lie there without caring for or helping us! D'Arcy! D'Arcy! for the love of heaven, come!' she pleaded, as with her small, feeble hands she endeavoured to raise him from the bed.

Meanwhile the vessel rolled and surged, and utter darkness was not only 'on the face of the waters,' but in the small cabin from whence muttered words, devoid of sense, proceeded, and which were in wondering dread, heard by the coloured nurse, who, in the saloon near by, was endeavouring to still the cries of her baby charge, the while her own conviction was, that both she and little 'Massa Gerald' would soon be at the bottom of the lake.

It was by this time nearly midnight, and the *Ohio*, straining, creaking, and labouring, was making but little headway, when the cry arose that the fuel on board was all but exhausted! The captain, whose energies seemed paralysed by the danger of the situation, staggered along the deck with livid face and shaking head, while the storm raged round the apparently doomed vessel, and brave men said openly to one another that their days were numbered, and that all hope was at an end.

It happened, however, that there was on board the *Ohio* one of those exceptional spirits who in

moments of danger rise superior to their fellows, and show the world what courage, joined to moral superiority, can effect. This man, a tall, gentleman-like looking Virginian, had seen with exceeding pity, the extremity of terror from which Claudine was suffering, and which she indeed made no effort to conceal. He had endeavoured, but in vain, to tranquillise her. His often-repeated assurances that all would end well, fell on unheeding ears, and, seeing the condition of mind into which abject terror had reduced the poor girl, he would gladly, had not the safety of the vessel and that of all on board called him elsewhere, have remained by the side of the sufferer. He left her on the companion-stairs, uttering—for poor Claudine was, alas ! no heroine—scream upon scream ; and bidding her hold fast to the rail, he hurried away to attend to duty's call.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, addressing the few passengers, as well as the ship’s officers who had gathered round him, ‘we are now close to the Genessee river, and in my opinion our only chance is to try and get in there. We *may* be dashed to pieces against the pier, but we *must* be lost if we try to ride out the gale this way. The boat can’t hold together much longer. You have used up the chairs, and all there was to

burn, so you had better settle right away what shall be done. I am an officer in the States Navy, and if you'll trust to me, I'll do my best to take you into harbour.'

To this proposal there was no dissentient voice. 'Men's hearts were failing them for fear;' suspense had become unendurable, and a hand-to-hand fight with death seemed to the Anglo-Saxons who listened to the brave, bold words, a better mode, should the worst happen, of ending all, than was the rolling, drifting, labouring towards the world unknown, which for twelve mortal hours, it had been the fate of those impatient spirits to undergo. Happily the suspense—the doubt—the question—solemn beyond all questions, of life or death must very soon be settled, for the harbour, as the naval officer had said, was not far off; and there were moments when, through the misty darkness of the night, glimpses of harbour-lights could, as the *Ohio* rose heavily upon the summit of a giant wave, be caught. These lights were on the extremities of two stone piers, which jutted far into the lake. The way between them was narrow, and upon the lumbering vessel answering, at the critical moment to the helm, depended the safety of all on board. Calm and motionless as a marble statue stood the Virginian, his hand upon



the wheel, and his keen eyes never for a single moment leaving the direction whence from moment to moment, a bright speck of light became visible ahead.

Ah! that wall of solid-seeming water which arose between 'the haven where they would be,' and the silent men who breathlessly awaited their coming doom—how terrible appeared its strength and power to kill! Of hope there was but little in their breasts, and it is doubtful whether—so reckless is the Transatlantic character—even at the last and most exciting moment—the moment when, on the crest of a monster wave (which *might* have crushed the *Ohio* like an eggshell against the pier-head, but *did not*) the vessel plunged inside the harbour of the Genessee river—a single prayer, one solitary cry to Him who 'holds the waters in the hollow of His hand,' escaped the lips of anyone on board.

The Southern gentleman's first thought, after hastily shaking the many hands which in Yankee-fashion were tendered for his acceptance, was of the frightened girl whom he had left clinging with her small delicate fingers to the railing of the companion-ladder. She had been, so far as he knew, for he had not noticed her before the storm began, quite alone on board the boat; and he doubted not, after he had sought

her in vain in the saloon, that she had taken refuge in one of the many state-cabins which opened out of that gorgeously fitted-up apartment. These, with the exception of one which was occupied, as he had been informed, by a sick gentleman, he searched, but searched in vain. The lady was nowhere to be found; nor had anyone on board, so great had been the confusion and alarm, taken any notice either of the girl or her ulterior movements.

Preparations were now, by all save the crew and the coloured deck-passengers, being made for leaving the vessel; and the navy captain was about to follow their example, when a woman, whom, in that she carried a white infant in her arms, he at once decided to be a negro nurse, suddenly addressed him in piteous accents of entreaty.

‘Ah, massa!’ she cried, whilst big tears rolled unheeded down her yellow cheeks, ‘we hab lost our mistress—Sam and me. She no anywheres aboard de boat, and massa he dying in de birth in dere;’ and she pointed with a shaking finger to the state-room in which D’Arcy Mainwaring lay.

‘I will go and see your master,’ said the Virginian, and the next moment he was by the sick man’s side.

The latter was conscious now. The dry, hot fit which usually lasted several hours, had passed away, leaving him weak as an infant, and bathed in perspiration. He had imbibed low fever at Washington, and had not been able to shake off the constantly recurrent ague fits which had taken hold upon his constitution. The cabin, small and dark, was truly a miserable place to suffer in, and the Virginian for a passing moment thought only of the tall stalwart form lying fully dressed upon that narrow couch ; but in a second he recollected what he had come to ask, and he said, whilst the nerves which were as steel as he guided the *Ohio* into port, quivered under the effort to speak calmly :

‘ You have a lady, sir, I think, with you. Has she been here—I mean, have you seen her lately?’

‘ No. Why? Where is she?’ asked D’Arcy, whose brain, still weak and confused, was slow alike to understand the drift of, and to take alarm at, these leading questions. ‘ I have not seen anyone; and if you would kindly send my servant——’

But he could say no more, for at that moment the man of whom he spoke rushed uncalled for into the state-room, and falling on his knees, exclaimed aloud :

‘ Oh, sirs ! oh, massa ! The Lord have mercy on us all ! The mistress is drowned and dead.’



## CHAPTER VIII.

‘My conscience has a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me.’

SHAKESPEARE.

‘DEAD! good God!’ exclaimed D’Arcy, as he fell back, weakened as he was by fever, on his unrestful couch; and then, to his horror and dismay, a feeling which was not *all* regret for the poor girl’s loss, flashed across his brain.

In silence he listened to the captain’s account of the diligent search which had been made for the one passenger on board the *Ohio*, who had, on that awful night, apparently fallen a victim to the fury of the elements; and when the truth of this statement was confirmed by Captain Montgomerie, the brave and intelligent Virginian gentleman who had in the extremity of peril come to the rescue of the apparently doomed vessel, Mr. Mainwaring allowed himself to be

persuaded by the latter that to linger longer (with any hope of finding the ill-fated girl) near the scene of the catastrophe, was absolutely useless. Physical weakness and utter prostration of spirit combined to render him amenable to the advice of his new acquaintance,—the advice, namely, of ‘taking the ’bus’—a six miles journey only—to the city of Rochester, where he would find ‘as good a doctor as any in the States.’

‘And he needs one too, poor fellow, if I’m not mistaken,’ was the Southerner’s remark (as he also prepared to enter the omnibus) to the *Ohio’s* skipper. ‘He looks half dazed, and only three parts alive to the fact that the mother of the little babby that the yaller gal holds in her arms, is gone to kingdom come. As to his looking any longer after the poor soul, who must have either in her fright, thrown herself into the water, or been washed over-board, that’s just darned nonsense. Why, he might as well try to catch a mosquito out of a Mississippi swamp as hope to find her now.’

‘Guess she was a coloured gal, warn’t she?’ asked the Yankee captain, as he watched, by the faint light of the harbour beacon, the disembarkation of his passengers. ‘I took stock of her, I did, as she came aboard, and says I to myself, If that ’ere Britisher tries to get his yaller sweet-

heart into the saloon, I'll jist let him know that I ain't agwine to stand that kinder thing aboard the *Ohio*. But she kep' in her state-room, she did, till the storm came on; and arter that I thought no more about the gal. I reckon,' he added, with the utter indifference to negro life which was characteristic of the States that did not make a profit by the 'Institution,' 'that the body's food for fishes by this time, and that the English stranger 'ull soon think he's had a good riddance of such rubbish.'

Captain Montgomerie, in his capacity of southern *gentleman*, was not devoid of kindly feelings towards the coloured population of his country. He was moreover keenly alive to the extraordinary beauty which is often to be found amongst the descendants of the mixed races, and had been quick to perceive, despite the veil which shrouded her features, that the *companion* of the evidently wealthy English traveller was very fair to see. How that same English traveller would—when he came thoroughly to himself, for as yet he was helpless almost as a child—'take' (as the expression is) the melancholy event which had occurred, was a problem that had yet to be solved. Captain Montgomerie, himself a man of some education and refinement was not

without experience as regarded some of the speedy consequences that are ever likely to result from such *liaisons* as the one he suspected to have existed between the Englishman and the drowned girl. The former had probably, he thought, adored her beauty—had loved her with such love as owes its birth solely to the influence of the passions; and when he found that *only* in face and form was she the perfect creature he had deemed her, then the weariness which is the outcome of ‘sad satiety’ had set in, and repentance for past folly had, when that folly ceased to charm, followed quickly on the heels of disenchantment.

As the Virginian, seated in the omnibus opposite to the invalid, noted the signs of physical weakness which were visible on the handsome features of the latter, and marked the nervous catching of his breath, he could not forbear from hoping that his fellow-traveller had arrived—*quoad* his affection for the dead girl—at such a ‘turn in the tide’ of his feelings towards her as would lessen the sorrow which her sad and untimely end must necessarily cause him. It was scarcely to be expected that he would not be deeply moved, seeing that, to the best of the captain’s belief, that beautiful octoroon was the mother of the child which the ‘darkie’ with the

coloured handkerchief round her head, had succeeded in hushing to sleep upon her lap; but the bereaved one was a young man—far too young, in the American's opinion, to have burdened himself with family cares, and his grief for the *loss* he had sustained would, the captain not unwisely concluded, be moderated by the reflection that there still remained in his favour a clear balance of *gain*.

On the following morning, his low fever being an intermittent one, D'Arcy Mainwaring awoke, to all intents and purposes a different man. He had but a faint recollection of the storm which had raged for hours—the while he lay tossing in delirium—round his head; but of the tragedy which had resulted from that storm, and the details of which, when the *Ohio* lay motionless in the harbour, had been made known to him by a stranger, he gradually arrived at a perfectly distinct recollection. Somewhat to Captain Montgomerie's surprise, he expressed no desire to return to the vessel whose deck had been the stage where poor Claudine's last appearance in this life had been seen and noted.

'You would, I am sure, have saved her if you could,' he, with a proud man's strong and visible effort to conceal the fact that he possessed human feelings, remarked on the following morning to the Virginian sailor who had been unremitting in



his kindly attentions. 'It is to you we all owe our lives. I heard a man say so last night ; but I wasn't up to thanking you then, and now—— Well, I suppose that life *is* a thing one *ought* to be glad of, and yet a painless death, mentally as well as physically, would be *my* choice, so that——'

'You have nothing to thank me for,' said the captain cheerfully. 'But,' he added, after the pause of a minute, 'how about the painlessness of drowning? I think the cold bath would have stirred you up a trifle, and then——'

'Ah !' interrupted D'Arcy eagerly. 'Tell me, for God's sake, if you, being a sailor, have any experience, or have ever known anyone who has had experience of what drowning *really* is ! There are some who say that it is of all others the death to be most desired. That, whilst the waters close above the doomed man's head, blissful memories crowd around his brain, and that he is lulled to his last sleep by sirens' voices singing of green fields and of joys once loved, but long since, perchance, forgotten. If there be truth in this——'

'Why, then, your Shakespeare's notion that it was "pain to drown" was all wrong ; but I suspect that the author of "Richard the Third" knew pretty well what he was writing about. Suffocation ain't a pleasant feeling I reckon, at

any time, let alone the thoughts of "ugly death" which come along with it; and the men I've known who've had a narrow squeak for their lives in the water, haven't had, by their accounts, a good time of it.'

'Then she, that unhappy frightened girl,' D'Arcy said—and his voice, strive as he would, was tremulous with emotion—'how did *she* fare, poor child, when she found herself alone with Death? Would to God that I had been with her in the surging billows of the lake! Heavens!' he continued, excitedly—so excitedly that the American feared greatly that the hot fit of fever was returning, and that the young Englishman would again be 'off his head'—it makes me mad to think that *I* was lying helpless, whilst she— But why did she not come to me? I have no memory—the poor, wild trembling thing!—of her voice, her touch, her cries!—yet Amy' (Amy was the nurse, who had been by her master questioned about the missing girl) 'says that she came more than once to call me to her aid——'

'Yes; and that you answered her in words that were devoid of sense, and the unhappy girl, bewildered by the storm, and dreading she knew not what——'

'You do not mean to say you think her end

was voluntary?' exclaimed D'Arcy with a passionate eagerness which went far to convince the Virginian captain that there had been a time when the beautiful slave-girl had been dearly loved by the man whose feelings now appeared to partake more of remorse than of despair. 'If you have any idea—any suspicion,' he continued, 'that her death was not owing to an accident, for heaven's sake do not keep the truth from me; I would far rather know the worst at once, most terrible to me as that worst might be, than be kept in uncertainty and suspense.'

'Which you shall not be by me. The young lady, when I saw her last, and that was not many minutes before I missed her, was clinging, with as wholesome a love of life as I ever saw in anyone, to the rails of the companion. When I left her to take the helm, I encouraged her all I could to hold on; but I suspect that she may have grown giddy-like, and then, poor thing, there was no help for her. No, sir,' musingly, but in a tone of firm conviction, 'it was no suicide; you may make your mind easy on that head. Life was, I'd lay a thousand dollars, as dear to that young girl as it is to you and me.'

After the melancholy and mysterious death of poor Claudine, D'Arcy Mainwaring did not linger

in the country to which she had, in fact, been his only tie. Having purchased the freedom of his child's nurse, he took her, together with the boy, to Europe. The little one, which had at its baptism received the name of Gerald, was to him not only a source of extreme embarrassment, but a depressing memento of a chapter in his life which he would gladly have blotted from the pages of his memory. He had resolved, however, to do, in the strictest sense of the word, his duty to the child; but the manner in which that duty was to be carried out still remained a problem which he did not find it easy to solve.

Should the reader chance to recollect the short sketch which we have already given of Lady Arabella Mainwaring's disposition and character, it will not, methinks, greatly surprise him to learn that, in lieu of hurrying home to Wrox-bourne, D'Arcy should, being burdened with the weight of his heavy secret, have preferred (after establishing his boy and the nurse under the care of a respectable English resident at Dinan) to continue during several months, the life of a wanderer on the continent of Europe; and it was to this respite from home worries that he had recourse.

At the time of his return homewards, which occurred more than a year after Claudine's death,

and when summer, at beautiful, luxurious Wroxbourne was at its height, Lady Arabella was a still handsome, and decidedly imposing-looking lady of some six-and-fifty years of age. A woman who has arrived at middle life without having suffered either in body, nerves, or feelings is generally one of those whose good looks hang about them long; and this had been the case with D'Arcy Mainwaring's mother. Such beauty as she possessed was caused by regularity of feature far more than by any charm of countenance or expression. Nature had either blessed or cursed her, as the case may be, with an utter absence both of womanly softness and of the power to sympathise with the sorrowful. Her sense of duty was strong, and her judgment of others (as is apt to be the case with the unttempted) habitually severe. Love of rule was, however, the most salient point in her character, and when her sovereignty at Wroxbourne was in any way, and however slightly interfered with, her ladyship could—to borrow her maid's expression—betray strong symptoms of being 'put about.'

Her son, whom she dearly loves to keep under subjection, has now been some weeks at Wroxbourne, and there had been as yet no clashing between her will and his. His resistance, however, to be present at a certain garden-party, a species

of entertainment to which he had an especial objection, provoked some 'words' on Lady Arabella's part, which she had better have left unsaid. There was, in truth, some excuse for her annoyance, as the invitations to meet her son had been issued before his return, and therefore it was that she spared no arguments in order to induce him to be present at the *fête*.

'It will,' he said, 'be an affront to the whole county if you absent yourself;' and then, in her desperation, she added, 'If I were to tell you that Lilian Fielden is expected at home to-morrow, I dare say you would change your mind. Rather hard, though, upon a mother to have thus to dangle a bribe before her son's eyes in order to induce him to yield to her wishes. It is one of the things, however,' with a sigh, 'which parents must make up their minds to bear.'

But little more was said on either side. D'Arcy committed himself by no promise. Nevertheless, on the following day, his presence on the lawn at Wroxbourne gave ample proof that the bribe had not been 'dangled' before his eyes in vain.





## CHAPTER IX.

‘ ’Tis little joy  
To know I’m farther off from Heav’n  
Than when I was a boy.’

Hood.

‘YES, they *are* pretty, certainly, but I could almost wish that they were not. They would match their disagreeable voices better if they did not look so delicate and fair. But tell me, Mr. Mainwaring, about those other beautiful Americans—the lovely creatures that mother talked to us about when she came home. There was one, she said, who lived on the island—what a wild place it must have been!—that my father was so nearly buying; and mother, who spoke to her once, told us that she never could have imagined anything so perfect as both the face and figure of that Spanish girl.’

Lilian Fielden and D’Arcy Mainwaring are sauntering on the banks of a large sheet of orna-

mental water which forms one of the chief attractions of the Abbey grounds. It is the day of the famous garden-party, and the lawns and glades—to say nothing of the shady walks where ‘grove nods at grove,’ and the ‘wilderness’ where wild clematis and woodbine climb and cluster amongst the ivy-mantled rees, are everywhere besprinkled with guests. Amongst those guests are two exquisitely dressed, and delicately fair American girls. They are staying at Fellsborough Castle, one of the great ancestral homes of the Earls of Oldham; and as they have been throughout the London season very decidedly ‘the fashion,’ their appearance—to say nothing of their demeanour, which is the reverse of retiring, and their voices, which to English ears are far from attractive—occasion a considerable amount of comment amongst the stay-at-home inhabitants of Whinshire.

Eustace Fielden’s pretty daughter has shared the general curiosity regarding the Transatlantic fair ones, and has frankly owned that she considers they have been over-praised. She is herself not only the ‘beauty,’ but the pet and pride of her division of the county. She is so bright, so true, so unpretending, so entirely free from any silly and underbred assumption of superiority over her fellow-girls, that even those who might



be inclined to envy her popularity, and grudge her the admiration which everywhere awaits her, are disarmed by the inherent charm of a character so unselfish and so genial. She is tall and fair, with eyes so like in hue to Rousseau's favourite flower—the scentless periwinkle—that her mother has sometimes laughingly regretted that the girl had not been named 'Vinca' at her baptism.

'In which case I should have been called throughout my life by no other name than *Perry*. Oh, mother,' added Lilian merrily, 'only think what you would have entailed upon me!'

The far-reaching branches of some giant beeches are overshadowing the path, and the calm surface of the lake is carpeted with the broad green leaves and snow-white blossoms of the water-lily. They stand for a few moments in silent contemplation of those fairy-like cups with centres of pure gold that are poised so lightly on their bed of verdure.

'How exquisite they are!' Lilian in a low voice remarks. 'The Southern girl, let her loveliness have been what it might, could never equal them in glory.'

'In glory, no; for pity is what they, poor girls, inspire—deepest, sincerest pity.'

He speaks with a sad seriousness which perplexes Lilian, who, lifting her blue eyes to his, says gently :

‘And why are they to be so compassionated? But I remember now that mother said the same of the young girl who lived with her old father on the island. But he was a gentleman, was not he? and she a young lady, beautiful, and——’

‘Despised! They come of a detested race, dear Lilian, and no loveliness—no purity can shield them from the misery which is their lot. But if you please, we will not talk of them. Those laughing, chattering Yankee girls, who are in every respect as inferior to—to the poor octaroon of whom your mother talked to you, as one human being can be to another, would nevertheless speak of her and treat her as though she were a pariah, a thing too low and mean either for their notice or their pity. But, as I said before, we will not speak of them any more; and you must tell me how you liked your first “season”—your first real experience of the world. It seems so strange, after leaving you almost a child, to find you—well, what you are; I mean so little changed, in spite of balls, and—and admiration——’

She interrupts him with a silvery laugh.

‘I was dreading the word “flirtation,”’ she says; ‘and as I am wholly guiltless of that kind of wickedness, I should have fired up in my own

defence. But *you*, why is it that you do not do your duty to the young ladies, who in London seem to suffer so much from want of partners? You used to be such an untiring dancer.'

'Ah, that was in the days of my youth, and in the country, which makes all the difference. A London ball-room would be more than I could stand. Life is too short to subject one's self to such a penance. Besides, I like to see young women at their best ; and *that* they never are in London.'

'Why not? They are generally beautifully dressed.'

'Are they? Perhaps that is the reason. At any rate, I like them better in the country. I am not sure that I should feel quite as certain, even about you, if I were to see you beautifully dressed, as you say, in a London ball-room. I have a passion, I suppose, for reality, and real things; real flowers, for instance, cannot exist for long in the vitiated atmosphere of London life. I wonder a little,' he added after a short pause, during which Lilian had been slightly marvelling at the seriousness of his tone, 'that Mrs. Fielden should have consented to that visit, and without her too. Why, Lilian, when she was in America, and you were safe in the country, and still in heart, as well as years, a

child, she was constantly tormenting herself about some imaginary danger to her girls. I was often the confident of her troubles then; and I can assure you that I prized my office greatly. But everything seems altered since that time, and I have not yet found courage to ask her why.'

Again there is a pause, which is broken by Lilian saying, quietly :

'My mother never changes to her friends. The alteration must lie, I am sure, in your own fancy only. When you were abroad together everything was, of course, so different; and it must have been such a comfort to her, when so far away from us, to have a friend to talk to about her children. But,' she continues, looking up with clear, frank eyes, and lips parted with a sunny smile, into his face, 'why should mother have been anxious about me when I was no farther from her than London, and was, besides, under the care of such kind friends, and indeed relations—for they claim us as their cousins—as the Davenports? And why,' blushing she knew not wherefore, 'do you imply that I too am changed—in heart, I mean—from what I was four years ago? I *feel* no difference, and excepting that I am—oh dear, how old it sounds!—nearly twenty, and have had, much to my regret, to put away *some* childish things, I am

the same girl, D'Arcy, that you used to tease and play with long ago in our dear old Herondale. Do you remember the swing, dear?' she goes on eagerly, for childish memories, thronging thick and fast, are casting conventionalities somewhat into the background, and Lilian's pretty lips are speaking from the fulness of her heart. 'The swing, I mean, in the cherry orchard, and the height you used to send me—so much higher than anyone else could! But I was never frightened, because it was you who hold the rope; although it did seem to me—you see I was such a child, with a child's heart, I suppose—that you tossed me very near the sky. And, D'Arcy dear'—this very pleadingly, and with two small lavender-gloved hands resting confidingly on his arm—'you will come to Herondale, won't you, to see dear mother? and you will talk to her as you did in the old days? And she will be glad, I know, for it has grieved her to think that you were estranged from us. She is not strong now, and was not well enough to come to-day; but I may tell her—may not I?—that you are true to the friendship of days gone by, and that we shall soon see you at Herondale, where you can judge for yourself whether we, at least, have become, during these three years of separation, changed in heart, and chilled in

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feeling towards the dear D'Arcy Mainwaring who seems inclined to give us up so quietly.'

She has spoken, as I have said, from out the fulness of her heart, and with eager, nay, with almost passionate feeling. D'Arcy could not, even had he wished so to do, have interrupted her. The light touch of her fingers on his arm has been very pleasant, and the glance of the soft eyes—so deeply blue—had struck sharply against his heart-strings. He well understood that it was for her mother's sake, far more than for her own, that she had thus urged him to visit Herondale; and therefore it was that as they two—as winsome a couple as ever lingered beneath green-wood tree—stood, joined as it were together by those gentle hands, he—not perhaps without a struggle with his less prudent self—resisted the strong temptation to take the pleader in his arms and hold her there. He kissed, however, very tenderly, the slender fingers which had released his arm, promising, as he did so, that the next morning he would ride over to Herondale.

'For,' he said, 'I have much to confide, dear Lilian, to your mother; and when she has heard my secret, it will be for her to say whether or not I am to be free of the dear old place in future.'

The words had scarcely left his lips when voices, shrill and loud, were heard from amongst

the trees, and the pair, all innocent though they were, sprang apart like guilty things; for Lilian had seen enough of the world to know that the bachelor possessor of twenty thousand a year is watched with a lynx-eyed interest by women, and that scant mercy is often shown by them to the girl he seems to favour. She felt no shame in that she had spoken as to an old friend to the man who was so good a *parti* that mothers as well as daughters strove in somewhat brazen fashion to win him for their own; but she was shy of the world's comments, and of the unfair colouring which it often gave to facts. Nor was D'Arcy far behind her in an intense dislike to being talked about, the consequence of which conformity of feeling being, that their joint action produced precisely the effect which they were desirous to avoid.

From that hour, whispers not altogether to the advantage of Miss Lilian Fielden were bruited about. More eyes than one had caught sight, not only of the familiar attitude of the pair, but of their ill-advised and sudden separation, the general opinion on the subject being that if the young lady were *not* engaged to Mr. Mainwaring, it was high time that her father should inquire how matters stood between the 'parties' whose love-tryst had been thus unceremoniously broken

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in upon. *Nec scire fas est omnia*; and there is doubtless an unfortunate tendency in human nature to make the worst of what we *do* know.

‘There is a lust in man no power can tame,  
Of loudly publishing his neighbour’s shame;  
On eagles’ wings immortal scandals fly,  
Whilst virtuous actions are but born, and die.’







## CHAPTER X.

‘ Within this wall of flesh  
There is a soul counts thee her creditor,  
And with advantage means to pay thy love.’

KING JOHN.

‘ You have heard my confession, full and entire, now, dear Mrs. Fielden, and I can expect nothing short of the sentence which so great a criminal deserves. Of one thing, however, you may be certain—namely, that you cannot condemn me more severely than I condemn myself; and any penance which you may impose, short of at once giving up all hope of becoming Lilian’s husband, I will endure without a murmur or a complaint.’

D’Arcy Mainwaring had been, for the space of more than an hour, closeted in her morning-room, with the mistress of Herondale; and during that time he had, to borrow his own expression, made a full and entire confession of the sins which he greatly feared would stand in the way of his

acceptance by Lilian's parents, as a suitor for their daughter's hand. Much of that which he divulged was either known to, or had been previously guessed at by his auditress. On all important points, however, she had been totally ignorant, and those points were the death of Claudine Montes and the present wish of D'Arcy Mainwaring to obtain the hand of her daughter. The hope which in earlier days she had indulged, that Lilian would one day become the valued wife of one so worthy of her love as D'Arcy, had, since the ill-fated trip to America, faded into nothingness. She had sorrowed greatly over the thought that so it must be. D'Arcy had become entangled, as the phrase runs, with the beautiful octoroon; and whilst that entanglement lasted, it was well, the mother had told herself, that her girl should be spared the sight and companionship of the man whom in her almost childhood she had learned to love.

D'Arcy's continued absence from England had strengthened her conviction that the tie which bound him to Claudine was both close and lasting. Mrs. Fielden and her husband had taken their departure for Europe almost immediately after their return from the expedition to the Gulf, but it had become known to them that their late companion had lingered long on the American con-

tenant. He had been seen in Canada, and had been at that time, presumably not travelling alone. Then for a short space they heard no more of their friend. His letters to Lady Arabella were few and far between; but at length, late in the autumn of the past year, he had written to announce his return from the Continent, and his purpose to spend a few weeks at Wroxbourne. He came, and all those who had known him previously were struck by the change which four years had made both in the demeanour and the appearance of the long-absent man. It was not that the personal comeliness for which he had been remarkable had disappeared, but the character of his 'good looks' had changed. The 'ruddiness' of youth, and the smoothness of skin which denotes absence of care and sorrow, had given place to a certain sallowness of complexion which some young ladies admired as 'interesting,' and to lines across the forehead and about the mouth which could only (at least, such was the general opinion) have been produced by mental disquietude. In this belief, those who commented on the subject were confirmed by the entire absence of the lively spirits which had formerly so greatly conduced to D'Arcy Mainwaring's popularity. It was only by fits and starts that he now contributed to the amusement of others.

The old spirit of fun had fled away, as it appeared, for ever, and 'loathed melancholy,' or something that was near akin to that detested nightmare of the soul, had taken its place.

Whenever, as was the case with D'Arcy and Eustace Fielden's wife, the confidence between two persons has been for a lengthened period entire and without restriction, the sudden keeping back of any suspected secret, and the marked avoidance of any especial subject is generally the cause of disunion, if not indeed of alienation from each other. His old friend noticed with deep regret the traces on D'Arcy's expressive face not only of grief but of remorse. That he dreaded on her part any recurrence to the past was evidenced by the little inclination which he displayed for her society. His visits to Herondale were rare and formal in their character, but Mrs. Fielden could learn from her girls, and especially from her elder daughter, whose temperament was less calm and reticent than was her sister's, that when they chanced (their mother not being present on the occasion) to meet Mr. Mainwaring in society, he was always very 'nice' and pleasant to them.

Lilian was right in saying that her mother would rejoice in a renewal of the intimacy which between D'Arcy and the Herondale family had formerly existed, but only the sanguine nature

of youth could have prompted her to imagine that the relations between them and that thoughtful, serious man could ever again be as they had been. Deep within her heart—too deep to be even by herself and her own mental plumb-line fathomed—lay her love for D'Arcy. It had become, having been the growth of years, so imbedded in the fibres of her being, that it was a part of her own nature, and therefore no more to be separated therefrom than was any other vital portion of her frame. Amongst the earliest of her childish recollections was the protecting kindness of the Eton boy; nor had the man of twenty-six shown himself to be a less firm friend and ally of the shy, unformed girl who had often, in that she was herself far from reliant, been thankful, on her initiatory introduction to society for the shield which D'Arcy's guardianship threw over her early mistakes and *bévue*s. Mrs. Fielden had, as we have already hinted, feared at that period of her daughter's life, that the child's heart was in young Mainwaring's keeping. Subsequent observation, together with the Transatlantic episode, had relieved her from that fear; one, however, which was destined to be renewed when, after her friend's long-delayed return, he and Lilian met again, and there came over the girl's air and demeanour one of those changes which only a

mother's eye, quickened by tender love, can see. And now—ah, the blessing of it!—he, with a frankness and good feeling worthy of the D'Arcy of old days, had not only made to her a clean breast as regarded his past errors, but had confessed his love for Lilian, and his hope that she would become his wife. There was much in the tale he had told which both grieved and shocked her, but as the sinner had shown himself to be truly repentant of his faults, and seeing also that the woman whom he had wronged had been removed by death, alike from the harsh judgments of the world, and from any hope or expectation that in this life tardy justice might be done to her and to her child—why there was still a prospect of happiness for Lilian. The little boy was a misfortune certainly, but D'Arcy was rich enough to provide for him amply, and it was possible, seeing that the poor octroon had been mercifully taken from the evil to come, that D'Arcy Mainwaring's wife might never hear of her existence. A kinder-hearted and a less selfish woman than the one who thus reasoned, did not exist, but I think it was only natural that she should dwell more tenderly on the interests of her living daughter than on the memory of the dead girl who when living had been a barrier against the due performance by the owner

of Wroxbourne Abbey of his duties as an Englishman of good estate.

It was with these thoughts floating through her brain that the châtelaine of Herondale replied to her friend's appeal. He was seated exactly in front of her sofa, his elbows on his knees, and his hat held between his hands. He had spoken in a low voice, and with much seriousness, but there had been no sign of agitation either in his voice or manner, and that he was a man capable of great fixity of purpose must have been apparent even to the most casual of observers.

'Your story is a very sad one,' began Mrs. Fielden; 'but you were right—if you love Lilian as you profess to do—to tell me the entire truth. That poor girl! She was very beautiful, but if she had lived you could never have been able to—to feel otherwise than remorseful for the past.'

'If she had lived I would have made amends to her for that past. She would have been my wife, and I should have been spared the remorse which now must haunt me to my dying day.'

'What, even if you marry Lilian? If she loves you well enough to consent to be your wife, are you to make both yourself and her miserable because, forsooth, an accident prevented the fulfilment of your good intentions? I do

not understand you, D'Arcy. If you still cling so fondly to the memory of that unhappy girl, you must not—cannot think of marrying Lilian. It shocks and pains me to hear you speak of her, and of that poor lost soul in the same breath.'

'As it has given me pain to do, and as I could not have done had I loved Claudine, or clung, as you express it, fondly to her memory. It is a fact that I did not love her, for I had grown weary—God! how soon! of the woman whose whole passionate heart was mine. I strove to hide the truth from her, but in vain. She reproached me, then grew jealous, irritable, and suspicious. She was intelligent, but had no taste for self-improvement—no love for reading, no powers of conversation. Even her love for the child was a purely animal feeling. Sense of duty she had none. A beautiful wild creature, incapable of self-control, or of even comprehending the meaning of the word "principle," was she a fitting wife for an Englishman who would gladly have his wife respected? And yet it was my firm determination—would to Heaven she had known that so it was!—to marry her. She died, poor, passionate, misguided creature, not only in the belief that I loved her not, but in ignorance, as I have said, of my intentions towards her.



Amy, the child's nurse, has told me that her mistress overheard words uttered by me when I was rendered delirious by fever, which were well calculated to drive her to distraction; and if this were so, who can assure me' (and a visible shudder ran through the strong man's frame), 'that the unhappy girl, maddened by despair, did not, with all her sins upon her head, rush unprepared into the presence of her God?'

'It is indeed a dreadful thought,' Mrs. Fielden was beginning; but her companion, whose calmness had now well-nigh deserted him, and who was walking with rapid strides to and fro the chair on which he had been seated, was too much engrossed by the awful image which his own words had conjured up, for any interruption on her part to be heeded by him.

'You will, I am sure, understand,' he continued hurriedly, 'that the desire to make amends, aye, to do even penance for my conduct towards Claudine, is the feeling which is now uppermost in my mind, and that therefore——'

'Therefore?' repeated Mrs. Fielden interrogatively, for he had paused, and she was growing impatient of delay.

'Therefore I feel it to be my bounden duty to do so much for her child that perhaps—but ah! how fervently I hope it may not be so!—you may

think it incumbent on you to bid me renounce my pretensions to Lilian's hand.'

The ice was now broken. A purpose tolerably distinct in its general character had been announced, and a hint as to the possible consequence of that purpose had been suggested. After this, discussion became comparatively easy, and, seeing that this portion of my story may justly be termed preliminary, and a mere forerunner, as it were, of that which leads—in fact, the nucleus and real heart of the matter—I deem it advisable to condense in as few pages as possible the specific biographies of Lilian and her lover. 'Part the First'—a very important one for the due understanding of this narrative, will then be completed, and the reader, if he feels so inclined, will be enabled to continue with an enlightened mind the perusal of my story.





## CHAPTER XI.

‘ I have a work,  
The finger of my soul doth point it out ;  
I trust God’s finger points it also out.  
I must attempt it.’

ALEXANDER SMITH.

THE amends which D’Arcy Mainwaring proposed, for the satisfaction of his own conscience, to make to the dead Claudine and to her son, were of so stringent, and indeed of so extraordinary a character, that on their first announcement, Mrs. Fielden at once decided that no consent could be given to the wooing of Lilian by a man capable of entertaining such preposterous and hitherto unheard-of notions. The said ‘ notions ’ (and it was very evident that D’Arcy did not intend to abate one jot or tittle of the advantages which it was his purpose to bestow upon his son) were as follows: In the first place, little Gerald was to be strictly and uncontestably legitimatized, and in order to effect this object it was necessary that

his father should become 'naturalized' in any country (say France, for instance) where such legalization of birth is practicable. Wroxbourne was not entailed, and it was the fixed purpose of the present owner to leave the whole of his landed property to his son, 'Gerald Mainwaring,' whose right to bear the family name would then have been rendered certain and indisputable.

As may readily be imagined, such ideas as these were thoroughly repellent to the parents of the girl whom D'Arcy sought for as his wife. The mere introduction beneath her roof of a child which might, reasonably or otherwise, be talked of as her husband's son, would have been, in their eyes, a sin both against morality and good taste; but to acknowledge this unfortunate one as his *own*—to blazon forth, as it were, and flaunt his former errors in the face of the world, and in that of the pure-minded young creature whose affections he had gained, this was indeed terrible, and Eustace Fielden, whilst talking the subject over with his wife, expressed himself warmly to that effect. But after a while, calmer and more prudent reflections had their due and influential weight.

It became clear, as time passed on, and the intercourse which it had been found injudicious to entirely check, continued between the young

people, that Lilian's heart had passed altogether into D'Arcy Mainwaring's keeping. In many respects the marriage was a desirable one. It was known to a few, and suspected by many that Mr. Fielden's finances would have been, but for a *ruse* which would under most circumstances have been inexcusable, in a very disorganized and unsatisfactory state. His wife had at the eleventh hour succeeded in preventing the fatal purchase by her husband of Don Ribiera's island. In order to effect this, she had spoken confidentially of her anxiety to the New Orleans lawyer who was engaged by Mr. Fielden to complete on *his* part, the arrangements for the purchase.

'Oh, Mr. Hedlett,' she had said, a sudden idea having, in the course of a long and sleepless night, occurred to her, 'this affair is killing me! If it is carried out, my husband, as you well know, will incur a felon's penalty, and my children will be beggars! Are you *quite* sure,' she added, looking as she spoke, fixedly and with especial meaning into his face, 'that there is no flaw in the title? Search once again. It would never do to purchase the property, and then find the right to its possession disputed.'


Mr. Hatwood P. Hedlett sat for a moment silent, his gaze fixed with an air of profoundest admiration on the client who had sought his aid.

‘Well, you air a smart lady,’ he said at length, and forthwith proceeded to, in the most effectual manner, obey the said lady’s behests.

The latter, being a conscientious and a truthful woman, suffered not a little in that she had been thus, as it were, compelled to perform towards her husband an act which some might reprobate as treacherous and mean. Her own heart, however, condemned her not, and therefore she was enabled to await with patience the time when it would be safe and prudent to confide to one so singularly constituted (morally) as was her husband, the share which the wife of his bosom had had in his disappointment. The war between the North and South which soon afterwards broke out, together with the conviction of Mr. Tollfree for a bank robbery, were seized upon by her as occasions when she could venture to throw off the burden of her half-guilty secret, not triumphing in that she had been right in her conclusions, but owning the sin which, with the best intentions, she had committed. And Fielden, in his secret heart, which, despite his *pigheadedness*, was a fairly good one, acknowledged that ‘Mary’ had stood between him and ruin; his *amour propre*, however, was stronger (as is apt to be the case with men who are ‘cock sure’) than his sense of justice, and he could not bring him-

self to own to the woman who had rescued him, that he appreciated her act. She, however, who had hardly hoped to 'escape whipping,' was thankful to be spared reproof. Singular to narrate, although it was through *his* fault, *his* imprudence, and *his* love of speculation that the once well-to-do owners of Herondale were in 'difficulties,' it never occurred to this good wife and thoroughly unselfish woman either to contest her husband's superiority, or question his right to look down upon herself.

But we must now take up again the thread of my history, and recount how that six months after the proposal which had, at its first hearing so greatly angered Lilian's parents, that young lady became the affianced wife of D'Arcy Mainwaring. After that auspicious event, the bridegroom had pretty much his own way regarding his plans. In order to facilitate, for their daughter's sake, the objects which their future son-in-law had at heart, Mr. and Mrs. Fielden, who would for their children's good have been willing to make any sacrifice that might have been required of them, took Lilian to the Continent, consenting not only that she should be naturalized as a French subject, but that the small waif, which the young bride (for he was the prettiest and most engaging of children) had already



learned to love, should be rendered by legal means, eligible for the proud position of heir to Wroxbourne and its dependencies. And thence it followed that without any unnecessary delay, the 'happy pair' commenced, under somewhat peculiar circumstances, the journey of life together.

The marriage, or rather the circumstances contingent thereupon, was as gall and wormwood to Lady Arabella. She took comfort, however, and forebore from loud-voiced complaint when it was found, after the lapse of years, that no children were likely to be born of her son's marriage with Lilian. After all, Gerald was her grandson, and his father's child; bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and withal as handsome a lad as ever by his beauty gladdened a parent's heart; to take him to *hers* became, therefore, after awhile, no impossible task to the Dowager autocrat of Wroxbourne. Although hers was a nature difficult to soften, it became also soon very apparent to those about her that if there did exist a tender chord in Lady Arabella's breast, that chord had been stricken into life by the unconscious hand of her grandson, Gerald.

And so the years passed for this family, calmly and uneventfully onward. The Mainwarings, for various reasons, spent much of their time on the



Continent. 'Out of sight is,' as they well knew, apt to be 'out of mind,' and, as they rightly conjectured, any half-suspected mystery regarding their family history was more likely to die out in their absence, than would have been the case had they passed at the Abbey the years which intervened between Gerald's adoption and his arrival at the age of twenty-one. The young heir's coming of age was, however, an event of sufficient importance to require the sojourn of the nomad party for a longer period than usual at the Abbey. It was there that the event was to be celebrated. In a mild fashion, certainly, and without the 'pomp and circumstance' which Lady Arabella would have brought to bear upon the occasion, but from which both D'Arcy and his wife recoiled. Still there were reasons why the fact of Gerald's being twenty-one should not be allowed to pass as an altogether unimportant circumstance, and therefore as the time approached for the commemoration, Mr. and Mrs. Mainwaring quitted Rome, in which city they had passed the winter, and commenced (without Gerald, who was to join them at Cologne, he having been studying during the last twelve months at the Bonn University) their journey towards home.

A home which, alas! they were not destined to reach; for at Genoa, both husband and wife

were taken ill with fever, and almost before the intelligence of their danger reached Gerald, all hope of their recovery was at an end. They died within three days of each other, D'Arcy being the first victim to a malady, the seeds of which were supposed to have been laid in Rome. Lilian, in her weakness and semi-consciousness, was spared the knowledge that she was a widow, nor could she, to the exceeding grief of her dead husband's son, realise the fact that he was shedding tears of agony over her scarcely breathing form. When all was over, the poor young fellow, feeling, in his utter desolation, certain (after the manner of his age and temperament) that all happiness was henceforth impossible to him, returned to England. For many weeks after he reached the Abbey he absolutely refused to be comforted, whilst those about him—they being ignorant of the fact that he was a child of the tropics—marvelled greatly both at the violence of his emotions, and the long continuance of his grief.





## CHAPTER XII.


‘He cannot flatter ; he,  
An honest man and plain, he must speak truth.’  
SHAKESPEARE

GERALD MAINWARING was, and on that point there could exist no two opinions, a strikingly handsome young man. His beauty was indeed both of a kind and of a degree which could hardly escape from comment and admiration. Men as well as women were ready to acknowledge that the young owner of Wroxbourne, and of an income of twenty thousand pounds per annum, might—so faultless were his form and features—have stood as a model either for a ‘glorious Apollo,’ or for a replica of that marvellous bust, regarding which Byron wrote the unanswered question, ‘Can there be more poetry gathered into existence than in that wonderful creation of perfect beauty?’

But although in his outward man Gerald

so greatly resembled the beautiful Bithynian, although the eyes of the child of the South partook of the same languid softness which must have lent a dreamy charm to the quasi-Asiatic lineaments of the demi-god, yet to draw from this physical similitude any ideas unfavourable to the young Englishman's *morale*, would have been to the last degree unjust. He was, in fact, at the age of twenty, one of those singularly pure and unselfish characters of whom we often read, but whom we are rarely privileged to meet. The example, as well as the teaching of his excellent parents, and more especially the gentle warnings of the woman whom he had loved and revered as the mother whom he fondly believed her to be, had been so productive of results to this, the sole object of their solicitude, that in one branch at least of the education which is supposed needful for a gentleman, Gerald Mainwaring was found (when the deaths of those he loved left him for the moment alone indeed) strangely, if not, it may even be said, disastrously ignorant. Of knowledge of the world—of its wickedness, its selfishness and its greed, he was almost as little cognisant as is the maiden of fifteen, over whose purity of mind and thought, a loving mother has kept watch and ward. So intense had been Mr. Mainwaring's

anxiety that no whisper, however faint and vague, regarding his birth should reach his son's ears, that the boy's education had been entirely what is called a 'home' one. The little experience that he had acquired of 'life,' and of the mental organizations of those who live and move and have their being in the 'world' in which he (Gerald) was, owing to his birth and position, destined to play no humble part, had been gathered from the companionship of a few carefully-selected friends, as well as in a perhaps larger degree, from books which, as a rule, dwelt more on the 'right,' than on the *seamy* side of human nature. If it had been the intention of D'Arcy Mainwaring to, before his death, reveal to his son the secret of the latter's birth, and the steps which had been taken to neutralize the effects of a great and irretrievable error, it was in truth to the last degree unfortunate that the 'convenient season' for so doing never arrived. Death stole a march upon the man whose worst weakness it was that he could not bear to be the cause of suffering to any soul that lived. From day to day he had postponed the moment when Gerald was to learn from his own father's lips that he was worse than motherless; and the attack of fever which proved fatal to both him and Lilian was of so sudden and




severe a character as to render them both—from the very commencement of their illness—in-capable of mental exertion.

‘All was ended soon, the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow ;’

and thus, for Gerald, doubly orphaned (for so he believed himself to be), there commenced, and that without the advantage of a warning preface, the first really important chapter of his life.

If anyone had ventured, during the first hours of the lad’s bewildering grief, to hint to him that in the space of little more than twelve short months the healing influence of time would have more than begun its normal work of consolation, he would have resented the supposition as an affront. He was constitutionally passionate, for not in vain did the warm blood of his octeroon mother circulate through his veins. He was quick also to *feel*—generous and impulsive. The controlling hand was there no longer, and before Gerald Mainwaring had been, during the space of two months, virtually his own master, he had learned not a little that tended in after-life to his advantage.

The year of mourning was passed quietly by the new owner of the Abbey. Mr. and Mrs. Fielden felt the loss of their daughter and son-



in-law very keenly; nor could they, which I think was only natural, take the same comfort in Gerald's presence and companionship as might have been the case had he in reality been of their blood and lineage. He was dear to them, however, both on his own account, in that he was gentle, caressing, and beautiful, and were it only for the reasons that he had been dearly loved by Lilian, and was the son of their most valued friend, his treatment at Herondale would have been one of which he could have found no reason to complain.

With Lady Arabella the case was widely different. The handsome, lovable young fellow, who in his childhood had been her idol, was in very truth, as I before said, bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh; and being such, it was now her pleasure, seeing that she was—during the few months which, previous to his coming of age, must elapse—one of his appointed guardians, to spoil and indulge him to her heart's content. Lady Arabella had never approved of the system of education which her son had adopted for the boy. D'Arcy and his wife together, had made, she was wont to declare, a perfect milksop of her grandson. Ignorance and innocence were all very well for a girl, but for a young man, and especially for such a young man as Gerald, a want of acquaint-

ance with the world and its ways was the greatest possible disadvantage. Such being her ladyship's view of the matter, it is not surprising that efforts on her part to counteract the ill effects of such injudicious training were at once set on foot, and that it was from his grandmother's lips that Gerald received in theory his first lessons *quoad* the desperate wickedness of the world.

The lad was intelligent, and he learned quickly; but for all that he did so learn, the knowledge of men and things which from various sources he obtained, tended neither towards the hardening of his heart, nor the bewildering of his moral perceptions. From what has been said, however, of his idiosyncrasies, I would not have it supposed that, either as regarded intellectual endowments, or force of character, he was in any degree remarkable. On the contrary, he had, together with the warm passions of his mother's race, inherited no small portion of the constitutional indolence which in the African races is so marked a characteristic. The lad's decided disinclination to either mentally or physically exert himself, had even in his early childhood been regretfully noted by his father, and no pains had been spared to counteract a weakness which D'Arcy Mainwaring rightly designated as a formidable one.



It is in the second week of an especially rude and blusterous March. The north-west wind is raging madly round the stout old walls of Wroxbourne Abbey, and making wild work with the over-thick mantle of ivy which covers them, and adds so greatly to the picturesque beauty of Gerald Mainwaring's home. Not a few long sprays of 'the rare old plant' have been wrenched from their hold upon the stones and mortar by the ruthless whirling of the storm, a fact which is made somewhat worryingly evident by periodical tappings and flappings against the window-panes of the Abbey's south-east front.

Lady Arabella's boudoir 'looks,' as the saying is, to windward. It is a large bay-windowed room, expensively rather than tastefully furnished, and utterly deficient in those essential requisites for a human *den*, namely, light and coziness. Such as it is, however, it suits not altogether ill the person of the lady, a large proportion of whose existence has been passed within its walls, and who is now seated on as straight-backed and unyielding an arm-chair as ever, for their sins, the upholsterers of our ancestors invented.

She is not alone. On a seat which, compared to that occupied by Lady Arabella, may almost be described as 'easy,' an elderly gentleman has placed himself. The visitor is one who in his

own house, and especially in his own so-called 'study,' piques himself upon having everything comfortable about him. He owns to a very decided objection to straight-backed chairs, and has been frequently heard to say that he never returns from a visit to Wroxbourne Abbey without paying—in the shape of a severe pain in his shoulders—the penalty of his rashness in venturing within the precincts of Milady's old world morning room. The visitor is an old friend and neighbour, being none other than our former acquaintance, the owner of Herondale, who, as becomes his added years, is in many respects extremely unlike the self-willed, eager-after-change man whom we have seen determined, in the face of rational advice and affectionate entreaties, to become, instead of a respected English country gentleman, that generally loathed and looked-down-upon individual yclept a South American slave-owner. Nearly half a century of time, a considerable amount of domestic sorrow and annoyances, together with a certain degree of half-imaginary invalidism, had combined to cool the current of Eustace Fielden's blood, and render him a more stay-at-home and domestic-comfort-appreciating man. He had done his duty thoroughly towards the boy who by his dead daughter had been loved so well, protesting the while that his co-guardian was one of the most

injudicious of women, and had done her best to counteract the good which *he* had, by unceasing care, effected. The latent pugnacity in Mr. Fielden's nature was therefore the not unfrequent cause of a war of words between himself and Gerald's autocratic relation.

That handsome heir to wealth and consequence is the wholly unconscious subject of a discussion which is at present being carried on between Lady Arabella and her visitor.

'I cannot imagine,' the former is saying, 'what you and other people mean when they suggest that I am over-indulgent to Gerald. In the first place he is a man now. More than twenty-one, and it is high time for him to—as the nurses say—feel his feet.'

'And when he has felt them, he will very soon be off; you will see that,' responds Mr. Fielden, as he smooths his hat, and betrays by a half smile, a certain agreeable consciousness of his own powers of repartee. 'Young people are like birds,' he adds sententiously; 'directly they begin to perceive their own powers of locomotion, the nest is no longer a place for them. Off they fly—but I beg your pardon—the noise, that constant flapping—I am afraid I have not made myself clearly understood. It is hardly, however, *my* fault—that ivy—begging you and your

gardener's pardon—ought to have been cut back weeks ago.'

'Of course it ought, and would have been, but for Gerald; but he, poor boy, has such an admiration for that thick coat of ivy, and a thorough clipping disfigures the walls so much for the time being, that——'


'You allowed the boy to have his very unreasonable and unreasoning way. All very natural, but my dear lady——'

'My dear sir,' puts in Lady Arabella impatiently, whilst her cap-strings vibrate, and her crochet-work comes to dire confusion in her hands. 'We must not forget that everything is in fact Gerald's, and that he has a right to do what he likes with his own. He is the best and dearest of boys, but it does not do, you know, to press a willing horse too far, and my grandson has a spirit of his own——'

'In addition to all his other valuable property!' breaks in Mr. Fielden sardonically. 'He is indeed a most fortunate individual! But as to forgetting things! In *my* opinion it would be well in many cases if our memories were less tenacious than they are. Memories indeed! How seldom is it that looking back upon the past is a source either of pleasure or of self-congratulation.'

It was very rarely, especially when in the pre-

sence of Lady Arabella, that Eustace Fielden gave voice to the strange species of irritation which the bare mention of Gerald's name sometimes occasioned him. He had a fellow-feeling, in that both had mourned for the loss of a child beloved, for the unpopular old lady, whose partial deafness was probably in part the cause of this outburst of feeling. When we are far from sure that the ears of our listener are certain to catch *every* syllable which we utter, it not unfrequently happens that in our unguarded moments we are less apt than usual to put restraint upon the untameable member which we all of us unfortunately possess. Not willingly would Eustace Fielden have angered his hostess, or (a far more difficult task) have hurt her feelings. It had always, moreover, been his endeavour to conceal from her the fact that in his dealings towards his ward, *heart* did not altogether go hand-in-hand with duty. That he was jealous of some unborn child, the child with which his daughter's eyes were never gladdened, was simply absurd; yet so in fact it was, and Gerald's whilom guardian, whose good sense was, in this matter, constantly at war with feelings which he knew to be as ridiculous as they were unjustifiable, had no sooner given vent to his irritability than he endeavoured, by a sudden change of tone, to coun-



teract the mischief which he might have done.

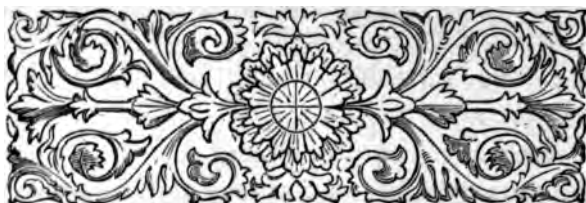
‘Gerald is a very fine young fellow,’ he says, ‘and good as gold ; so you may well be proud of him, my dear lady ; but I cannot conceal from myself that what everybody says——’

‘I don’t care a pin’s point what everybody says——’

‘Ah ! Well, as to that, everyone cares more than he thinks he does ; and the time may come—I sincerely hope it may not—when you will see, and perhaps allow (though *that* is more problematical), that to be never thwarted is anything but good for young people.’

‘You are thinking, I suppose, of the thief on the gibbet ?’ remarked Lady Arabella ; and her laugh as she makes this pithy remark is far from pleasant to the ear.

‘No, indeed,’ her guest responds good-humouredly, as he rises from his chair. ‘I was remembering your unfortunate ivy, and what a loss in beauty it will be, when, by reason of its own weight, whole layers of it will be wrenched, some tempestuous hour, from the walls. And for that misfortune you will have only your own kind indulgence of Gerald’s fancies, to thank.’



## CHAPTER XIII.

'The drying up a single tear has more  
Of honest fame than shedding seas of gore.'  
BYRON.

THE time has now somewhat more than arrived when a certain lady, well appreciated by Gerald as his 'dear Aunt Madge,' must, seeing that she plays a not-wholly-unimportant part in this story, be introduced, by a short description, to the reader.

Margaret Fielden, who, together with blue-eyed Lilian, had been the only issue of their parents' marriage, had never, at least such was the opinion of her many friends, seen the man whom she loved well enough to accept as her husband. In this, however, the said friends were mistaken, for Madge had, in her earliest youth, given her heart silently, fervently, and for all time, to one who proved unworthy of the gift. Percy Sumner, a professed lady-killer and a male flirt, vocations of which the unworld-

taught country girl knew nothing, chanced, unfortunately for Margaret, to meet and to admire her. She was a winning creature, high-spirited, ready of wit, and, in a dark, gipsy-like style, extremely handsome. Her hair was black as night, strong in texture, and growing low upon her broad forehead. A 'fine girl' was Madge, both in face and figure; and Percy Sumner, who had begun by admiring her beauty and doing his best to make her appreciate *him*, fell by degrees into the weakness of, to a certain extent, loving the high-spirited young creature whose heart it had been his purpose to wound. He never in so many words either told her of his love, or asked her to be his wife. Had her face not been her only fortune, he would perhaps have sacrificed his liberty at the altar of such love as he was capable of feeling; but Colonel Sumner could not, or rather imagined that he could not, afford to marry a penniless wife; and so it fell about that Margaret, whose whole heart had passed into the possession of one who was a perfect master in the art of winning woman's love, found herself, after his triumph was secured, alone with her shattered hopes.

And she never loved again, nor was her sorrow confided to any soul that breathed. After awhile, Time, the mighty conqueror, did his



accustomed work, and that so thoroughly that when, at the end of some three years from the period when Percy Sumner had wrought her that cruel wrong, she heard that he had eloped with an heiress with whom it was scarcely possible to imagine himself in love, contempt for the man who could thus make market of his good gifts, was the strongest sensation which the news excited in her mind.

The years rolled on, and Margaret Fielden, for the reason probably that she gave to her numerous admirers no encouragement to make their proposals in form, received no more offers of marriage. She had, however, reached the age of forty, when *the* man again took 'heart of grace;' for Colonel Sumner's wife about that period died, leaving all her very considerable property to her husband. The latter had by that time fallen into ill-health, or rather into invalid habits which rendered the possession of a wife necessary to his comfort; and his thoughts not unnaturally reverted to the still handsome woman whom he had once loved, and who had remained, at least so his vanity whispered, single for his sake. He, nothing doubting of success, made his offer in writing, and was courteously, nay, even kindly, refused. She was too old, so Margaret wrote, to think of marriage, and her spinster-like habits

were fully formed ; but she wished her old acquaintance well, and would always think of him as of a friend.

One of Aunt Madge's most marked characteristics was her sympathy with even the weaknesses which she despised. Sooner than wound the vanity and self-love of the man whom she well knew to be one of the thinnest skinned of God's creatures, she attributed her rejection of his suit to causes which were anything rather than true ; for not only was winsome Madge Fielden the very reverse of precise and prim, but to all intents and purposes she was fully twenty years junior to the battered old beau who, with gout in his system, and a wig which deceived nobody upon his head, had thus tardily placed himself and his fortune at her feet.

At the end of five years (Aunt Madge having then entered upon her forty-sixth summer), the peevish, *ci-devant* guardsman was gathered to his fathers. He died, thanks to his late wife's fortune, a wealthy man ; and to the profound astonishment, not only of Margaret, but of the world in general, he bequeathed to the 'only woman who had refused him,' the sum of fifteen thousand pounds. Against accepting this legacy Margaret's proud spirit rose in rebellion, nor was it till after it had been clearly ascertained

that amongst the late Mrs. Sumner's few relations and connections there existed none who stood in need of pecuniary aid, that Aunt Madge, not for herself, but for the 'poor whom we have always with us,' took possession of her unlooked-for thousands.

When that event occurred, Gerald Mainwaring had been two years married, and his wife was shortly expecting an addition to her family. This, however, is an unpardonable forestalment of events, and we must retrace our steps to the period when, being emancipated from legal control, the fortunate son of the ill-fated Claudine Montes took possession of his inheritance, and became, soon after that event, acquainted with a family with whom his relations eventually became intimate. The name of this family was Brudenell, and it claimed a certain amount of cousinship with the Fieldens of Herondale. Their respective grandfathers had been brothers, but as the progenitors of Eustace had been the elder of the two, it had followed that his junior's lot in life was a more chequered and less prosperous one than that which awaited the hereditary owners of the family property. Of late years the meetings between the cousins had been, owing to various circumstances, few and far between; when, however, they had chanced to come in

contact, much cordiality was mutually expressed. Colonel Brudenell had been a gallant officer and kindly gentleman, whilst his wife, being, when in society, one of those *suave*-mannered, smiling women whom it is customary to describe as 'such a nice person!' 'always so good-natured, don't you know,' it came to pass that after the Colonel's death, his widow, finding herself on one occasion within visiting distance of Herondale, wrote to its owner a cousinly note proposing herself and her two daughters as guests for a few days at the old family place, the offer not only occasioned no surprise, but was with immediate, and frank hospitality, accepted.


This event occurred shortly before the instalment of Mrs. Brudenell and her family in London. Gerald Mainwaring chanced at that time to be absent from Herondale; for Lady Arabella, whose displeasure had been great at the refusal of her grandson to celebrate by any public rejoicings his coming of age, was being to a certain extent appeased by his consent to remain at the Abbey until his intended departure after Easter, for London.

The old lady's over-indulgence of the lad had not resulted in the gaining by her of any strong hold on his affections—he felt his deficiency in this respect, and did his utmost, but without

avail, to remedy it. Love is essentially a spirit which, more especially in deep and tender natures, will not come when it is called for; and seeing that at the present time, Lady Arabella, in consequence of recent failure, manifested a temper more than usually acrimonious, it followed that Gerald's well-intended efforts to feel towards her as a loving grandson should, became proportionately difficult.

On hearing that the Brudenells were in a few days expected to arrive at Herondale, Lady Arabella betrayed a caustic bitterness of speech which to one whose temper was less sweet than that with which Nature had gifted Gerald Mainwaring, would have been sorely trying.

'Oh! so you are going to have company at home, I hear!' was her first remark, an emphasis being laid on the word 'home,' inasmuch as it was her ladyship's wont, when her temper got the better of her judgment, to imply, as well as to maintain the fact, that Herondale was by Gerald considered far more in the light of his own *chez-soi* than ever Wroxbourne had been or would be. 'I hear that the girl is a beauty,' she continued, 'and that Mrs. Brudenell is a regular schemer, so you had better mind what you are about, or you will be caught before you know where you are.'



‘Now grannie,’ Gerald answered coaxingly, ‘you must not set me down as such an utter muff. I have seen more than one pretty girl in my time, and I may admire this cousin of mine, without running any risk of being what you call caught by the blue eyes of the girl to whom her godfathers and godmothers have given the quaint name of Vinca.’

‘Humph!’ snorted Lady Arabella; ‘so you know already that she has blue eyes? And you intend, I suppose, to throw me over, and go to Herondale whilst these cousins—as they profess to be—remain there. Is it so? I shall be glad of your answer, although I well know what, after your recent disregard of my wishes, I have to expect from you.’

At this recurrence to a grievance which he had hoped was amongst the forgotten ones of the past, Gerald could have groaned aloud. To one so kind of heart, and indolent of nature as he, peace and quietness were well-nigh as essential to his everyday comfort as was the pure air of heaven. For a few moments he was silent, objecting greatly to a renewal of the debate on the coming-of-age question, yet still more disliking the subject to which the expected advent of Mrs. Brudenell and her daughters had given rise. At length he said:

‘I wish, dear grannie, that I could persuade you to think as I do about the festivities and rejoicings on my birthday for which you were so anxious. If my dear parents had been alive, all would have been so different; but indeed my grandfather felt as I do, that as they were gone, it would be heartless on my part to proclaim with sound of trumpet and fife that Wroxbourne had in consequence of our loss, become mine.’

‘Well, well, we have gone over all this before, and Mr. Fielden’s opinions are no rule for mine; but about your going from the Abbey at present, I must say that as both you and the Herondale people will so shortly have deserted Whinshire (leaving me all alone, and without neighbours, in this great empty house), it would be more considerate on your part to remain here till you leave for London.’

‘Just as you please, grannie,’ said Gerald quietly, for he had not as yet had an opportunity of judging for himself whether or not the fair Vinca’s companionship was worth the trouble and annoyance which contention with his grandmother would occasion him. ‘I must, however, I suppose,’ added he, ‘ride over one day to Herondale, to do the civil thing to Mrs. Brudenell, but the rest of the time I will devote to you.’


And so, for the moment it was settled. Lady Arabella having gained her point, recovered her good humour, which endured till the afternoon of the following day, when Mrs. Fielden drove over, a distance of nine miles, from Herondale, with the bold purpose (Aunt Madge accompanying her as a contingent force) of doing battle for the possession, during Mrs. Brudenell's visit, of the young owner of Wroxbourne and its dependencies. As the open carriage in which the two ladies were seated drove through the beautiful park, studded with grand old trees, beneath the shade of which many a 'velvet' denizen of the lordly place was quietly browsing, Margaret, whilst her eyes rested on the costly luxuries which met her view, fell into a reverie of which certain unhappy starvelings who had of late come prominently under her notice were the chief and heart-stirring figures; and she was thus musing when suddenly the sound of Mrs. Fielden's voice broke in upon her sad comparisons.

'Fancy,' she said, 'a young man possessed of such a property as this not having the courage to call his soul his own! Will Gerald ever be able, I wonder, to take his proper part in life? Here we are, you and I, Madge, undertaking a long and fatiguing drive, in order to do what he ought



to have sufficient manliness to effect for himself ! It really is—when you come to think of it—*too* absurd !’

They formed a striking contrast in appearance, that mother and daughter, the former of whom had just spoken her mind so plainly, whilst the latter was thinking how best she could put in a good word for her dead sister’s adopted son. A small woman with her abundant snow-white hair braided closely under a black bonnet, which was very decidedly behind the fashion ; a woman whose still attractive face bore unmistakable traces of the life of care and sorrow which had been hers, and whose habitual demeanour was (excepting towards the very few to whom she had granted her confidence, and who had found their way into her heart), uniformly cold and reticent, such was now the wife of Eustace Fielden, and the not-to-be-comforted mother of the child whom she had lost. For Madge, clever, high-spirited, warm-hearted Madge was, alas ! but ill-fitted to supply poor Lilian’s place, or to console the parent to whom her younger daughter had been all in all. It was in Mrs. Fielden’s nature to bestow her affections on those who needed support and sympathy, rather than on the independent of mind and body, who without her aid could



bravely fight the battle of life. Had Gerald's temperament been akin to that of her surviving daughter, Mrs. Fielden would probably have, in some degree, shared her husband's unexpressed feelings towards his ward, but the gentle, yielding character of the latter had been precisely of the kind with which she was the most inclined to sympathize, and therefore it was that, with the exception of some extremely rare outbreaks similar to that which has just been recorded, she uniformly showed herself more than tolerant of the few failings and short-comings which marked the character of D'Arcy Mainwaring's son. On this occasion, as well as on every other of a similar kind, Aunt Madge had her good word to say for Gerald.

'It is not manliness that he wants, poor boy,' she said, 'but energy. And then he is so peace-loving, so naturally anti-combative! Besides, mother,' laughing, 'you should take into account the magnitude and importance of the foe! It requires some courage, and considerable confidence in one's own resources, to do successful battle against Lady Arabella; and we shall see to-day whether or not we also do not find ourselves ignominiously beaten in the skirmish.'

She looked, as she spoke, extremely unlike one

destined to suffer defeat in any warfare in which she might become engaged. Large of person, with a complexion rich in colouring, and with dark eyes aglow with life and fire, Margaret Fielden—in her useful and somewhat defiant black hat, round which was twisted no concealing veil nor ornamental garland—with her short and naturally waving black hair blown into disarray by the fresh March wind, and her white teeth gleaming between her rather full red lips, appeared in truth an opponent who was little likely to be worsted in a fight. Such as she was, the still handsome spinster had long been Lady Arabella's *bête noir*. The latter disliked her coming visitor for many causes. For her absence of rank-worship; for her quickness of observation and repartee; and for what the widow called the Radical and Broad Church opinions professed by Miss Fielden, but above and beyond all for the deep affection of Gerald Mainwaring for his so-called aunt, and the influence which the latter had happily succeeded in obtaining over Claudine Montez' son.





## CHAPTER XIV.

‘Golden fruit, but dangerous to be touched.’

SHAKESPEARE.

‘Now, *that* is what *I* call cowardly,’ remarks Mrs. Fielden, as a glimpse is caught of Gerald making a hurried and evidently surreptitious retreat into a thickly-wooded shrubbery, which served as a screen to the Abbey stables. ‘He has seen us coming, and has left us to Lady Arabella’s tender mercies! Such a deplorable want of moral courage!’

‘I dare say we shall do just as well without him,’ laughed Margaret, as she placed her foot on the carriage-step, and then, the great lady having been pronounced to be ‘at home,’ the visitors were ushered into her habitual *sanctum*.

‘Let Mr. Mainwaring know that Mrs. Fielden is here,’ said Lady Arabella to the servant who announced her guests; and then the trio seated

themselves, and began the work of making conversation.

The motive of this visit was as well-known to Lady Arabella as if it had been written in large letters on the black silk mantles of her visitors. They were there to persuade Gerald to resist her wishes. He was wanted at Herondale — very greatly wanted, indeed, seeing that there would be two young ladies to amuse, and that there existed for miles around nothing presentable which bore the dress and semblance of a ‘lady’s man,’ save and except young Arthur Willoughby, who was reading for ‘orders’ with the Vicar of Wroxenford. Of these facts Lady Arabella was perfectly cognisant, nor could she, to herself, deny the truth, that Gerald’s proper place, during Mrs. Brudenell’s visit, was at Herondale. She was, however, determined not to give way. She, and she alone of the contending parties, had any real claim upon the duty and affection of her grandson, and to her rights as his sole blood-relation she made up her mind to cling.

Aunt Madge — after the preliminary civil speeches which are *de rigueur* on such occasions had been duly made — was the first to introduce the subject of which the minds of the three ladies were full.

‘We have come, Lady Arabella,’ she said, as

the smile which to most of those who knew her seemed so pleasant brightened her dark, gipsy-like face, 'earlier in the day, I fear, than we ought, but we were so anxious to find you at home in order to ask a real favour. Gerald's presence at Herondale will be a great boon to us all next week, and if you would lay your commands upon him to give up, for four or five days, the pleasure of being at home here with you, we elders promise to return him safe and sound on Friday. On Monday we expect the Brudenells.'

'Exactly, and for that very reason I strongly object to your proposal—not,' suddenly correcting herself, 'that I endeavour to, in any way, control my grandson's movements—such a thing would be simply absurd; but as far as advice goes——'

'Then *pray* advise him, Lady Arabella! Tell him, as I so often have, that he wants shaking up. That he should break away from his indolent habits, and amuse himself as other young men do. If he were to fall in love with Vinca Brudenell, it would be perhaps the best thing that could happen to him.'

Lady Arabella drew herself up stiffly as she said, 'I must beg leave to differ from you in opinion, Miss Fielden. The amusements of the young men of the present day are not at all of

the kind which *I* should like to see engaging Gerald's attention; and as to falling in love! And with a Miss Brudenell! A regular girl of the period, if all that I have heard is true. Pray excuse my frank language regarding your friends, but my grandson's interests are *first* with me, and I am of opinion that the longer he can be kept from knowing such young ladies as those whom you wish him to "amuse," the better it will be for him.'

It was not a pleasant speech, and its bitterness was aggravated by a tone and manner which brought a flush of anger to Margaret's cheek. She was about—not being precisely an angel of meekness—to reply in words which were scarcely calculated to 'turn away wrath,' when Mrs. Fielden, in her character of peacemaker, put in her softer 'answer.' Being, however, as the New Orleans lawyer had said—'a smart lady' still, although the manner of her speech was conciliatory, she contrived with but little exercise of ingenuity to put her opponent in the wrong.

'I am truly sorry,' she said, 'to hear such a deplorable account of our relations. If we had known that they were so objectionable, perhaps—but no—I hardly see how we could have refused to receive them. It is unfortunate, certainly, that we should have heard no whisper of

Mrs. Brudenell and her daughters being persons to avoid, and——'

But here, Lady Arabella, who, seeing that she was now conscious of having spoken rashly and untruthfully, felt sorely troubled in her mind, broke in upon the quiet flow of Mrs. Fielden's suggestive words.

'My dear friend,' she said hastily, 'you quite mistake my meaning. I know, and have heard, nothing worse of Mrs. Brudenell's girls than what the world says of most young people nowadays. I am old-fashioned, I dare say—behind the times altogether—and I confess to having a prejudice against young ladies who talk slang, call young men unceremoniously by their names alone, and are, in short, what a writer of the day describes as the "roaring girls of the Victorian era"; still, I am much distressed—pained indeed—to have said anything reflecting on relations of yours. Pray believe that my doing so was unintentional.'

'I am happy to think that it was so; and I shall venture to hope,' continued the speaker, with a placid smile which, if it were intended to be aggravating, had the desired effect, 'that our cousins may not be found guilty of any of the heinous crimes at which you have just hinted.'

'But even if they should be,' put in Margaret, who found it impossible to any longer put a bridle



on her tongue, 'I cannot see what harm would be likely to ensue to Gerald. He cannot expect to *always* escape from the contagion of young women's society; and if they *all* resemble the description we have just heard, the danger of falling in with such girls may as well be incurred by him now as later. Better, I think, for our cousins may perhaps open his mind a little, and prepare him for the perils which in London society will beset his path. What do you say, Lady Arabella? Are we to have our boy, or are we to carry back to my father the unwelcome news that he, and he only, is to have the responsibility of entertaining these unlooked-for guests?'

Thus pressed for an answer, Lady Arabella was reduced to the necessity of giving a direct reply. She especially hated being pushed into a corner, and from that unpleasant locality the words flowed with greater asperity than usual from her lips.

'I regret very much,' she said, 'the impression which has gone abroad that I object to my grandson leaving home and seeking his amusements abroad. As I often say, he is his own master, and can choose his own pleasures. I have endeavoured to instruct him, or rather to give him some hints as to what the world is like. He had

been kept so ridiculously in the dark as regards his position and wealth, and the kind of prey which an unsuspecting young man is considered by the harpies, the hangers-on, and the swindlers of society to be, that I thought it a duty to give him some of the benefit of my experience.'

'And you will not allow Vinca Brudenell an opportunity of completing—or rather of following up your lessons?' urged Margaret. 'I am sure'—turning to Mrs. Fielden—'that *he* would like to come to us. Don't you think so, mother? We could ask him, could we not, Lady Arabella, before we go?'

'Certainly, if he is to be found; but, as you must, I think, have heard, I desired the butler, on your entrance, to let my grandson know of your coming, and as he has not appeared, he may have gone some distance from the house. His favourite walk is towards the East Lodge, so that if you return that way (when your horses are sufficiently rested, for you must not think of going before) you may, perhaps, fall in'—this with a sarcastic smile at her own wit—'with the prisoner you are in search of.'

'I hope we shall,' ejaculated Margaret; 'I have not seen the poor boy since the shooting was over, and I should like greatly to ask him how he can possibly get through his time. If he

were not as good as gold there would be danger of his getting into mischief.'

'Scarcely that, I think,' said Lady Arabella haughtily. 'My grandson is a gentleman, and has not now to learn what is due to *his* family and to mine.'

'*Noblesse oblige*,' laughed Margaret, adding, as she rose to go—Mrs. Fielden having given the signal for departure—'Blue blood has been the excuse for strange doings in its time, and the acts of the *Noblesse* have not *always* ended in their own triumph.'

The carriage had scarcely passed the sheltering belt of shrubs, when Margaret's keen eyes caught sight of the tall, well-set-up figure of Gerald Mainwaring. The sound of wheels brought him in haste from his *quasi* hiding-place, and there was joy in his handsome young face as he greeted the friends he loved.

'How quick you have been !' he said, after he had been shaken hands with by Mrs. Fielden, and been warmly kissed by smiling Aunt Madge. 'Why, it can hardly be twenty minutes since you drove up to the door.'

'So you saw us coming, you naughty boy, and skedaddled to the woods,' said Margaret, laughing merrily at the simplicity of his self-betrayal.

‘Mother and I saw at once how it was, and agreed that you played us a shabby trick.’

‘Did I? I am so sorry; but if you knew how I hate——’

‘A row, you were going to say,’ put in Aunt Madge, seeing that he hesitated in his choice of an appropriate word. ‘What *we* should call a discussion, I suppose. Well, ours was not very stormy.’

‘Or very successful, I fear?’ the lad asked wistfully, as, with his dark eyes fixed on Margaret’s pleasant face, he leant over the carriage door.

‘Well, no; I cannot say that we gained much by our interference. I rather lost my temper, I fear; and Lady Arabella went no farther than to say that you might do as you pleased.’

‘Which of course goes for nothing,’ said Gerald sadly. ‘Grannie always says that I may do as I like, but you see it is all so difficult, so annoying.’

‘But it ought not to be difficult,’ almost *whispered* Mrs. Fielden, who had a wholesome prejudice against discussing matters of a domestic character within the hearing of uninterested persons. ‘However,’ she added, ‘we will not enter into that subject now. There will be, of course, no difficulty made about your riding over to call on the Brudenells?’

‘And Gerald,’ broke in Aunt Madge, whilst a spark of *malice* shone in her brown eyes. ‘You must not forget that Wednesday is a public day for Wroxbourne Park and gardens. We *must* think of something with which to enliven our guests, and as we all know, strangers would consider themselves terribly ill-used if they were allowed to leave without being given a sight of the old Abbey.’

‘Certainly they would, and with reason,’ said Mrs. Fielden. ‘We will write to you, Gerald, at what hour the party from Herondale may be looked for. They will only come, of course, like public visitors, and Lady Arabella need know nothing about the matter till she sees their names in the Lodge-book. You can drive on now, Peters,’ to the coachman; and then, with a nod and a smile to Gerald, who was left standing in the roadway, the carriage and its occupants passed out of his sight and hearing.





## CHAPTER XV.

‘What mighty ills have not been done by woman?’

OTWAY.

SOME of the oldest and finest oak-trees of which the park, or chase, as it was more often called, of Wroxbourne could boast, stood at its furthest extremity—the extremity that was nearest to Herondale. The spot of ground thus grandly adorned was, excepting by artists and by keen admirers of sylvan beauty, rarely visited. A distance of more than half a mile from the nearest lodge and the absence of a footpath were the chief causes of the solitude which in one of the most beautiful portions of the park was well known to reign. Of this solitude Aunt Madge had decided to take advantage, when she wrote the following words to Lady Arabella’s ‘prisoner:’

‘We shall be near the “robber’s tree” at about four on Wednesday. You will of course do as you think best about mentioning the project to

Lady Arabella. You know *my* dislike to all but the most absolutely necessary concealments, and, although Wednesday *is* a public day, I think, after what has passed, that her ladyship might justly feel a little aggrieved if those, to her, obnoxious Brudenells were to venture so near the Abbey without due notice being given to her of their approach.'

'Now, I wonder whether the silly boy will have the courage to tell her,' said Margaret, as she affixed a stamp on the letter which she had been hastily directing. 'Gerald is the very dearest fellow in the world, only one does so long to put a little life and spirit into him. Even if he should be open with his grandmother——'

'She will, if she possibly can, put some hindrance in the way of his joining the party. His best chance, believe me, lies in silence, and really, when a person is so terribly unreasonable as Lady Arabella Mainwaring, he or she does not deserve to be dealt openly with.'

Margaret's clear sense of duty forbade her acquiescence in this opinion. The shortcomings of an adversary were to her thinking no excuse for the ill-doing of his opponent. In her eyes the line of duty was no imaginary one. Bold and distinct, as if 'graven with a pen of iron on a rock,' it stood out before her ; and in so far as

weak human nature permitted her so to do, that line, with a firm and equal step, she followed.

‘How good of you to let us come in this free and easy way!’ was Mrs. Brudenell’s first remark, as, in foreign fashion (for she had lived much abroad), she, on her entrance into the Herondale drawing-room, kissed her hostess on both cheeks; ‘and Margaret, my correspondent, you *must* let me call her by her pretty name. I long to thank her for that nice note of hers.’

‘She will be here in a few minutes. Madge is a very busy body, as you will soon discover for yourselves, and has been called away by an accident to one of the school children. Ah! Here is my husband!’ and as Mr. Fielden proceeded with extended hand to bid his guests welcome to Herondale, his wife, who had been suddenly and painfully overcome by the extraordinary resemblance of Vinca Brudenell (the elder and by far the more attractive looking of the two girls) to the daughter whom she had lost, was thankful for a short breathing time, during which she could endeavour to check the tears that were rising to her eyelids.

The girl, her features unshrouded by a veil, and with eyes of the same wondrous blue, which those who had once seen Lilian Fielden did not



find it easy to forget, stood with rosy smiling lips silently acknowledging her host's words of greeting. By a strange coincidence, her dress recalled to the agitated and bereaved mother's mind certain articles of apparel which had, before Lilian became a wife, been familiar to her eyes. Fashions, as we all know, 'come round' again, so it was not surprising that Vinca's large Rubens-shaped hat with its drooping feather, should have nearly resembled that in which, more than twenty long years before, Lilian Fielden had been pronounced so lovely. The closely-fitting costume, also, which concealed no single line of Vinca's perfectly moulded form, brought vividly before the poor mother's memory a certain riding-habit which, inasmuch as it was so almost miraculously 'well made,' Lilian had not been permitted by her careful father to display herself in.

'Oh, mother, mayn't I wear it?' the girl had pleadingly said. 'D'Arcy Mainwaring calls the fit perfect, and says I look as if I had been *run* into it, like warm jelly from a bag.'

As may be supposed, this eulogium failed in producing the hoped-for effect; and before the point was ceded, a slight—very slight—altercation had passed between the mother and daughter on the subject in question. Trifling, however, as that

'difference' had been, the memory of it, when called up by the sight of Vinca's graceful figure, sent a pang of self-reproach through Mrs. Fielden's breast. So true it is that a hastily-uttered word, be the sharpness of its wound ever so infinitesimal, is often repented of in sackcloth and ashes, when Death has rendered it impossible, either by a caressing word or look, to show that no unkindness had, by the speaker, been intended.

Mr. Fielden had not been slow to notice the resemblance which had so painfully struck his wife, and perceiving that the effect on the latter of Miss Brudenell's sunny beauty was not unlikely to be the shedding by her hostess of some very embarrassing tears, he wisely suggested a temporary adjournment of the tired ladies to their rooms.

'And here,' he added, as the door opened, and Madge, fresh and genial, entered, bringing with her, as was her wont, an atmosphere of cheerfulness and goodwill—'here is Margaret, my daughter, Mrs. Brudenell;' and the introductions having been thus duly gone through, the lately-arrived guests were speedily made to feel themselves at home.

'How odd they should have said nothing of Mr. Mainwaring!' were Mrs. Brudenell's first words after the door of the apartment allotted to her use had closed upon Miss Fielden's retreating

footsteps, and she found herself alone with her daughters. 'I suppose that he is at the Abbey, and perhaps—for they say there has always been a jealousy about him between the two families—I mean between Lady Arabella and the Fieldens—he won't make his appearance here during our stay.'

'What a dreadful idea!' said Vinca, who was smoothing her rippling braids before the glass. 'And Dora Wentworth wrote me that this is the very dullest neighbourhood! Not a country house, excepting Wroxbourne, within a dozen miles. I begin to wish that we had never come. Three whole days and two halves! How shall we ever get through the time?'

'By making yourself pleasant, as everyone ought to do under such circumstances. You will lose nothing, that is very certain, by being liked and admired by the Fieldens; and if they have no dinner-parties, the wear, at any rate, of your new cream dress will be saved; and white, even ivory white, gets to look dirty and shabby so dreadfully soon!'

'We must be thankful for small mercies, it seems,' rejoined Vinca, with a light laugh.

She was too young as yet to be a hardened schemer; moreover, her confidence in the power of her own attractions was too strong for any

doubts as to the eventuality of the brilliant marriage which she was well aware her mother anticipated for her to have yet crossed her mind. She dearly loved to find herself in what is called 'company,' and excitement (hitherto of a tolerably mild kind) was absolutely necessary to her enjoyment of life. Her preference for the society of men to that of her own sex was as strongly marked as it was openly acknowledged. She possessed a lukewarm heart, and not especially strong family affections. A fair share of common sense had fallen to her lot, but of *talent* she could boast but little. As the beauty of the family—and she was, in truth, very beautiful—Vinca had been, excepting by her father, a good deal more 'made of,' as the saying is, than was good for her. Nothing is so destructive of the shyness and modesty which are to youthful maidens what the bloom is to the plum, as an overweening sense of their own perfections. This wrong had, by injudicious praise, and by a still more injudicious yielding to her influence, been done to Vinca; the consequences of which imprudent 'raising' were evidenced by a confidence of manner and a recklessness of speech which, by persons of her own sex, were often severely commented on.

Mabel, the sister next in age to Vinca,



many respects as different from the latter in disposition, appearance, and character as two such near relations can well be. Her features were—at least, such was the general opinion—far too irregular for this tall and at present very decidedly *gawky* girl to run any risk of having her brain turned by admiration. Her complexion, to be sure, might improve, its normal condition being, at the age of nearly sixteen, a ‘muddy’ one, plentifully sprinkled during the tanning season (for Mabel was ‘wild and wayward’ in the matter of keeping her veil down and her sunshade up) with disfiguring freckles. She was by no means a clever girl, but though not gifted with brilliant talents, she was persevering in the cultivation of such powers as she possessed. Her love of music was intense, and her voice both sweet and powerful.

‘If only I could have some good lessons,’ the girl would sometimes say yearningly to Vinca, ‘I could sing in time as well as Patti or Nielson;’ and then her elder, who was very good-natured, and fully appreciated Mab’s unbounded admiration for herself, would be lavish of promises, which, when the beauty of the family had knocked down her millionaire, were (for Mabel’s benefit, and especially for the cultivation of that young lady’s voice) to be promptly and liberally fulfilled.



## CHAPTER XVI.

‘There, my blessing with you !  
And these few precepts in thy memory.’

SHAKESPEARE.

AUNT MADGE had long since made up her mind that it would be good for Gerald to marry early. As a rule, she was no advocate of those hasty unions between love-sick and inexperienced young people, the which unions are, in the wearisome leisure hours which quickly succeed the honeymoon, so often bitterly repented of. But Gerald’s disposition and temperament, as well as the circumstances in which he was placed, were decidedly exceptional. The well-ordering of his future life and conduct depended, at least so thought Margaret Fielden, in a great measure, if not, indeed, entirely, upon the *right person* obtaining betimes a powerful influence over his mind and feelings.

Alike from constitutional indolence, and from a large amount of a quality popularly known as

'goodness of heart,' Gerald Mainwaring was peculiarly liable to be led, whether for good or evil, by anyone possessing a stronger will than his own with whom he chanced to become intimate. The peculiarity of his education and bringing up, and especially the misfortune under which he laboured of not having had the training and early experience of life which a public school affords, were one and all (that is to say, according to Margaret's view of things) suggestive of the probability that the poor young fellow, when once he should be fairly launched on the wild waves of London life, would all too surely, as well as speedily, suffer shipwreck ! It was not in her nature to anticipate evil ; on the contrary, to hope for the best was, even under the least auspicious circumstances, Margaret Fielden's wont ; but it had been more than once her lot to note how helplessly and hopelessly lads of far stronger mental fibre than poor Gerald could boast of possessing had fallen, when in their paths the net of temptation was 'spread abroad with cords,' and the songs of the syrens sounded sweetly in their ears.

To one kindly sympathizer alone did Aunt Madge confide the growing anxiety which so greatly disturbed her mind, and there were especial reasons why the individual thus chosen

as the recipient of her troubles should enter into them heart and soul. Dr. Langham had been for more than a quarter of a century the Vicar of Wroxenford, and a valued friend of the Fielden family. His stipend was small, but he was not without private means, so that he, together with his excellent wife and only daughter, had lived in ease and comfort till such time as heavy trouble, caused by the misdoings of their eldest son, fell upon them. He was a fine-looking young fellow, and the Rector, who was proud of the physical perfections of his boy, gave him credit for an amount of intellectual capacity of which Master Hubert was profoundly innocent. Sharing, as Dr. Langham did, D'Arcy Mainwaring's prejudice against a public school education, the expenses of which, moreover, he was not perhaps quite rich enough to incur, Hubert received, during the first few years of his educational career, such knowledge as he possessed, at an excellent grammar-school in an adjoining county. A period of some eighteen months followed, and, it being deemed advisable by the Doctor that the lad should become a proficient in modern languages, the latter was duly despatched, first to Bonn, where he 'boarded' with a carefully selected English family, and in process of time to Caen, in which town he was especially



consigned to the care of the clergyman whose ministrations the British residents in that thriving French city duly attended.

At the age of seventeen, Hubert, who had left his home a boy, returned thither, after an absence of a year and a half, a man. All Wroxenford stared in astonishment at his bearded chin, and at the dark moustache which concealed the already sensual expression of his lips. Dr. Langham, who was more of a scholar than a man of the world, admired his son's good looks more than ever. The lad's knowledge of French and German was also to the partial father a never-failing source of pride, for the young fellow had certainly—whilst picking up sundry other tricks and accomplishments, the exact nature of which it is not necessary to chronicle here—acquired somewhat more than a smattering of foreign tongues. Contrary to the wish of his parents he had chosen the army as a profession, and the career, short as it was disastrous, which he had run, had brought not only bitter grief and shame, but something approaching to absolute pecuniary distress, upon the Doctor's family. He was a man whose nature led him to seek, when in affliction, comfort in the unburthening of himself to a sympathizing friend, and he found infinite relief—which his poor wife did not—in 'talking over' the lamentable details

of his son's wrongdoing, and it was from him, far more than from Mrs. Langham (intimate and dear friend of the Fielden family as the kindly woman had long been), that Margaret learned many of the pitiful and guilty acts which were connected with the ruin of the Rector's son.

'I don't wonder at your anxiety about Gerald,' he said once to Madge when he met her, a day or two before the arrival of the Brudenells, driving her little pony-carriage in one of the muddiest lanes that were to be found in the neighbourhood of Herondale. She had no attendant, being, as her custom almost invariably was, alone; and the Doctor, who had been visiting a sick parishioner, leant over the low splash-board to enjoy what he dearly loved—namely, a chat with sensible, kind-hearted Aunt Madge. 'We have had another reminder this morning,' he went on to say, 'of the frightful dangers which beset heedless young fellows on their first entrance into the world. A bill of a hundred and fifty pounds! And for what do you think? For broughams and victorias and ladies' saddle-horses!'

'It is very hard upon you—cruel, indeed—that you should be called upon to stint yourselves because of having to pay for luxuries for the wicked!'

'And,' rejoins the Rector, 'it is so hard to

know what to do with him ! Have him here, or indeed anywhere in England, we dare not ; for '—lowering his voice to a whisper—' the misguided fellow has put himself in the power of the law ! Took an oath that he was of age—you know he looks five years older than he is—and I believe the money-lender, a Jew called Balisher, knew it was a case of false-swearing at the time, for he has traded on the secret, and is the only one of the fraternity with whom it has been impossible hitherto to come to terms. Mrs. Langham is fretting herself to death about it, and, poor dear woman—wouldn't be best pleased if she thought I had talked to you on the subject. However'—sighing wearily—' amongst old friends, what is the use, I say, of secrets ? And besides, I think of Gerald, and certainly should not feel justified in keeping back anything which might be of use to you—in the way, I mean, of guarding him against a similar misfortune.'

Miss Fielden made no immediate reply to this well-intended speech. It was her own private opinion that Gerald Mainwaring could never, even when urged by sternest necessity, commit a dishonourable or unworthy action ; and this being the case, she, in the present instance, found it impossible to express any gratitude to her old friend in that he had, for her boy's sake, acted

contrary to his good wife's wishes. But although unable to utter a syllable of thanks, she could, and indeed did, most warmly give voice to words of kindly sympathy with the Doctor's hitherto unsuspected trouble.

'I can imagine no greater trial than the one you are undergoing,' she said gently; and then, laying her shapely hand upon his large and visibly trembling one, she, in still softer accents, added: 'My poor old friend! what *can* I say to you? Words are utterly powerless either to comfort *you*, or to give expression to what I feel!' Then, with a sigh which rivalled his own in sadness, she continued: 'As for our Gerald, he will have to take his chance, like the rest of the world! If only he possessed in London one of those invaluable friends who, by example, far more than by advice or warning, have sometimes obtained such beneficial influence over young and inexperienced lads——'

'Such friends are rare to find,' murmured the Rector, whose foot was on the low carriage step, the while the placid pony picked what comfort he could obtain from the few blades of grass within his reach.

'Indeed they are! And then, dear Doctor, the very qualities which help to render him so lovable are precisely—do not you think so?—of the

kind to lead poor Gerald into danger. The tenderness—I had almost said the womanliness—of his nature are productive, not only of a tendency to lean, but to one which, in my opinion, is still more dangerous——’

‘And that is——’

‘Well, it is not quite easy to explain my meaning; but I will do my best to make my folly, which I dare say it is, comprehensible. Like all somewhat weak characters, Gerald is only too likely, I fear, to be an unconscious imitator of any companion—that companion being one, *sous entendu*, whom he respects and admires—whose temperament and mental fibre are more vigorous than his own.’

‘And you foresee evils to the boy from this possibility? I confess that I cannot follow you in this alarm. Surely the imitation of one who is worthy of admiration and respect is more likely to lead to good consequences than to regrettable ones?’

‘Yes, if the model were in reality worthy of admiration; but Gerald is one of those trusting, imaginative characters who, when once a fancy is *taken*, is tolerably certain to invest the object of that fancy with far higher and nobler qualities than the model he has unconsciously set up is actually in possession of. It is,’ she continued after a pause, during which the Doctor, remem-

bering the dampness of his boots, was betraying symptoms of a coming move, 'heart-breaking to reflect how quickly our boy's opinions, and even his habits of thought, will receive their colouring, and that probably not an advantageous one, from those of the first individual who, from some unexplainable cause, has happened to obtain a hold over his imagination.'

'Ah, well!' sighed the Rector, 'you must hope the best; and as to anticipating evils, *that*, unless one can forestall a remedy, is a worse than useless procedure. What do you say now,' he added cheerfully, as he and his interlocutor shook hands, 'to the boy falling seriously in love? In *my* opinion he could do nothing better.'

'I quite agree with you,' laughed Margaret, as she touched her somniferous old pony with her whip, and gathered up the reins in her hands. 'But *dove la donna?*' and nodding her bright, dark head in farewell to her old friend and neighbour, she and her little vehicle disappeared round an angle in the lane.





## CHAPTER XVII.

‘Thou wilt be like a lover presently,  
And tire the hero with a book of words.’

SHAKESPEARE

To the great delight of the young lady guests, the sun shone gloriously over Herondale on the morning of the day when they had been promised a sight—not only of Wroxbourne, but of its owner. Miss Fielden had made no mystery of the circumstances under which the last named object was to be effected, but had laughingly alluded to what, indeed, all the county knew, namely, the difficulty experienced by Gerald in escaping from his grandmother’s thrall.

‘He has borne his captivity very patiently,’ she said; ‘but it is a pity—seeing how everything grows by what it feeds on—that he has yielded so often to Lady Arabella’s tyranny. Hers is a very autocratic nature, and I wish that he had broken his chains months ago.’

‘When he came of age? Yes, that was the time,’ responded Mr. Fielden, who was helping himself to cold ham at the sideboard. ‘He had passed the age and condition of tutelage, and there was every reason for his taking advantage of the opportunity to bring Lady Arabella to her senses.’

‘She must be a very formidable person,’ said Mrs. Brudenell, who, seated at her host’s right hand, was listening with open ears to the conversation which was being carried on around her; ‘or is it,’ she added, with one of the beaming smiles, which Madge had already discovered to be amongst the thousand shams of this hollow and artificial woman, ‘that Mr. Mainwaring is too kind-hearted not to let the old lady have her way?’

‘You shall judge for yourself,’ laughed Margaret, ‘as to that. Something of both I should say, for I have seen even brave people shrink before Lady Arabella’s—what shall I call it, mother? Is insolence too strong a word? And as for Gerald, the dear boy would not, if he could help it, hurt the feelings of a fly.’

Mabel, at this peroration, laughed outright.

‘Fancy,’ she said, ‘the feelings of a fly! You speak as if they had hearts and minds, whereas they have only legs and wings, and a body.’

‘And a head, which total is about as much as we



can see of any creature; but then, unfortunately our eyesight is so short! However, putting aside for the moment the higher gifts of the lower animals, let us congratulate ourselves (with them perhaps) on the lovely weather which we have for our expedition. Nine miles there, and nine back. Eighteen in all, and a good deal of wandering about the grounds—are you sure, Mrs. Brudenell, that you are equal to the exertion?"

‘Quite! I am dying to see Wroxbourne.’

‘But we shall not be able to enter the enchanted castle, I suppose?’ interrupted Vinca, who, having been a spoilt child, was not remarkable for filial deference. ‘We shall only be permitted to gaze at it from a respectful distance; and how odd it *will* seem, with the owner at our elbows all the time! I shall almost feel as if he ought to wish himself anywhere else.’

‘Which perhaps he will do,’ rejoined Aunt Madge cheerily. ‘Gerald is not much accustomed to female society, so, young ladies, as you are great—great, I mean, in our boy’s eyes—you will, I hope, be merciful. And now,’ again addressing Mrs. Brudenell, ‘how shall we make the most of this “pet day,” as my Irish relations would call it? Shall we——’

But her speech is again broken in upon by Vinca, who, in a tone and manner which differs

widely from her usually somewhat languid mode of utterance, says :

‘ Oh ! have you Irish relations ? I am so glad ! We have some too, but they are very distant ones. Still, far off as they are, they seem inclined to be immensely kinder than even our near English cousins are. We have been asked to go there next year——’

‘ To go where, my dear ? ’ put in mild Mrs. Fielden, who, although well-nigh half a Celt, was especially neat in the arrangement of her ideas, and was apt to be rather intolerant of verbal slovenliness. ‘ Ireland is—at least, so its inhabitants flatter themselves—a wide place. From which of the four provinces is it that you have received your invitations ! ’

Now the education both of Vinca and Mabel had been of a somewhat desultory and planless kind, for the only governess worthy of the name who had played any part in their mental training had been called in too late to counteract the ill effects of early, and long-continued neglect. In her frequently-expressed opinion, the young ladies had never been properly ‘ grounded ’ in any of the usual branches of education. Of ‘ geography and the use of the globes ’ they were especially ignorant, and Mrs. Fielden’s question regarding the Provinces of the sister island was as great a puzzler

to Vinca as if she had been called upon to give an account of the latitude and longitude of Yokohama. Mrs. Brudenell, however, proved herself equal to the occasion. She, at least, was aware of the fact that the West of Ireland and Connaught were in some sort synonymous terms, and that it was in the far West that the relations of whom Vinca had spoken, had, with genuine Irish hospitality, invited herself and her girls to visit them.

‘It is in the County Clare that the Macnaughtons live,’ she put in hastily. ‘The kindest, nicest people! We met them in Paris, of all places in the world; and they *were* such fish out of water! Understanding nothing, and yet so delighted with everything! Yes, I remember that expression—a “pet day”—Katie Macnaughton used it—don’t you remember, Vinca? that lovely morning when we all went together to Fontainebleau;’ and Mrs. Brudenell, after having thus, by a torrent of words, prevented the exposure of her daughter’s ignorance, informed her host that, having letters to write, she must perforce, during the morning, confine herself to the house.

‘It is more like May than the end of March,’ Vinca said, as she extracted, with a pinch of her dainty fingers, the exquisite perfume which lurks

in the half-open leaf of an early-budding sweet-brier. 'The scent of flowers—real country ones, I mean—always makes me feel as if I should never care to see a town again.'

The girl, who has thrown a light shawl over her shoulders, and placed upon her glossy head an old garden-hat belonging to Aunt Madge, is being introduced by that energetic daughter of the house, to the delightful kitchen-gardens which, with their long ranges of forcing-houses, and their old-fashioned admixture of fruit, flowers, and blossoming shrubs, were the pride and delight of Margaret Fielden's life.

'The lilacs come into flower earlier here than in any other part of the County,' she said. 'And the dear cabbage-roses, which are now so hard to find, still condescend to come to perfection in the Herondale kitchen-gardens.'

'And I,' rejoined Vinca regretfully, 'wasted all last summer without obtaining one sniff of a lilac-bough, or one plunge of my nostrils into the heart of a cabbage-rose! And oh, the hawthorn blossoms! I only caught a whiff of them occasionally from somebody else's garden, for we were at Leamington last year—out of the season—and all the hunting-men had gone. We always *do* go to places just when other people come away. They are cheaper, don't you know? but it isn't jolly, all the same.'

She looked wonderfully beautiful as she stood under the shade of an aged apple-tree, every leafy branchlet of which was thickly adorned with buds and blossoms—pink-tinted, on the snowiest white ground that ever nature painted. An expression half-humorous and half-pathetic shone in the blue eyes, which, shaded by their dark lashes, looked up inquiringly from the sweet young face. A face, however, it was that could not be described as ‘*only* sweet,’ for in it there was spirit too, and in her tone and words a something which denoted that Vinca Brudenell was no tame Grizzel, ready and willing to submit uncomplainingly to either a real or an imaginary wrong.

‘Gerald can hardly fail to think her lovely,’ thought Aunt Madge; ‘but——’ and even as the idea that it might not be well for the boy to do more than admire Vinca flashed across her mind, a distant gate which gave ingress into the garden, slammed to with a clang which caused the eyes of both ladies to turn in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

‘Oh, here is Gerald! Good boy!’ cried Margaret joyfully, as a tall, slight figure in riding costume, and with whip in hand, walked rapidly up the path to meet the more slowly advancing female figures, on one of whom his eyes had become suddenly fixed.

‘How nice of you to come! This is Miss Brudenell—Vince Brudenell,’ were the first words with which Margaret Fielden greeted the new comer. ‘We think her wonderfully like——’

But before she can finish her sentence, Gerald, who had, on this unexpected introduction, mechanically raised his hat, turns suddenly aside, and Vince catches sight of a cambric handkerchief which the young man has drawn from his breast-coat-pocket, and with which he is endeavouring to wipe surreptitiously some unbidden tears from his eyes.

‘Poor fellow! Do not notice him. He is thinking of his mother,’ whispered Aunt Madge, as, taking Vince’s arm, she led her a few paces away. ‘He was devoted to her; and your resemblance to dear Lilian is so marked—— But here he comes! Well, dear!’ addressing him in the brightest of tones—‘I hope you have not forgotten our project of invasion for this afternoon. We are to have luncheon early, for the evenings are still cold, and Wroxbourne will be in great beauty this fine sunshiny day.’


‘I think all I have seen of Marlshire beautiful,’ suggested Vince, whose compassion for this Apollo-like owner of twenty thousand a year was excited, both by his—to her thinking—evid-

ent shyness, and by the saddening effect which her own appearance had produced upon him. 'Herondale is absolutely charming! And this delicious kitchen-garden! The white pinks put me in mind of my grandmother's garden in Staffordshire, where I used to play so many years ago. There is no spring-flower so sweet.'

Before she has finished speaking, Gerald has stooped his tall figure to the clump of old-fashioned flowers of which she has spoken, and hastily gathering some half-dozen of the finest amongst their number, presents the little bouquet, with a by no means to be despised amount of manly grace, to Vinca.

'They *are* deliciously sweet,' he says (and the girl remarks to herself that she has rarely heard so pleasant-sounding a voice before); 'I am so glad that they are to be found in our county as well as in Staffordshire. One lives and learns,' he added, with a smile which increased, if possible, the charm of his handsome face. 'Now I must have passed those pinks—don't you call them? hundreds of times, and I never discovered any merit in them before.'

'They are what are called "modest" flowers, I suppose, like the violet and the daisy,' laughed Vinca. 'Flowers seem to me to be something like human beings in one respect; for I have



always noticed that if people don't assert themselves, no one thinks anything of them at all.'

'On their own merits modest men are dumb,' quoted Aunt Madge.

'And the conclusion, of course, is that they have nothing to say,' rejoined Gerald. 'Miss Brudenell is quite right, Aunt Madge. It is at their own valuation of themselves that people, as a rule, are appraised, and as for modest men! Why, there is something ridiculous in the very conjunction of the words.'

'And they always—I mean shy men—look so miserable!' pursued Vinca. 'At afternoon teas, you know, where they have been bothered into going, how they stand at the door, evidently ready to seize the first opportunity to escape. And have you not noticed the way that two and three get together, as if for mutual protection, and try to smile and look as if they didn't find the situation hateful?'

'Poor young fellows!' laughed Aunt Madge. 'You see, Gerald, what you have to go through, and you had better prepare yourself in time for the ordeal.'

No one knew better than Margaret Fielden that shyness of the kind described by Vinca was a quality utterly at variance with her favourite's character. His very want of knowledge of the



world, and of society prevented him from setting that undue value on its verdict which is the most frequent cause of bashfulness and *mauvaise honte*. With women, and especially with the class popularly known as young ladies, he had enjoyed few opportunities of consorting. From such specimens of the opposite sex as his Aunt Madge, and the large-hearted woman who had been unto him as a mother, Gerald had imbibed an impression very decidedly favourable to the so-called weaker vessels, on whom, notwithstanding their *feebleness*, the happiness and general well-being of the stronger, yet less numerous half of the community so largely depends. And then, be it remarked and remembered, women had, from his very birth, smiled kindly upon the boy who from a beautiful child had developed into what American ladies are pleased to call a 'lovely man.' He held an instinctive, yet wholly unreasoned on belief, that even Lady Arabella, hard as he *felt* her nature to be, had a soft place in her heart for him; and then, was there not dear little Cissie Langham, a tall slip of a girl now, who had lately passed her fourteenth birthday, and who, from the time when she began to run alone, had always preferred playing with him to disporting herself with either of her brothers? In short, 'ladies,' in so far as he had hitherto made their

acquaintance, had always smiled upon Gerald Mainwaring, nor had he any reason to fear that in the future he would be looked upon by them with less kindly eyes than heretofore had shone upon his handsome face.

He gave proof of his lack of shyness now, for his response to Miss Fielden was made in the true spirit of fun and 'chaff.'

'You will have to undertake a season in town, Aunt Madge, in order to be my *chaperone*,' he said; and then, turning to Vinca, he added: 'I hope I shall be equal to the task of self-assertion. Is it, I wonder, a natural or an acquired gift?'

'It depends a good deal on a man's profession, I think. No one, I imagine, ever saw, even in a dream, a bashful Guardsman.'

'Or a young Curate who was troubled with shyness! And yet, how strange that it should be so! I have often thought,' he continued, as the three walked slowly on abreast along the broad greensward walk that led towards the house, 'how impossible *I* should find it to do as they do. Fancy being perched on high—a young fellow without perhaps as yet a beard upon his chin—in order to instruct grey-headed men and sorrow-taught women in their duty! Every eye fixed upon his face, in the expectation, I suppose, that "great marvels" have been at work to fit

him for his post ! Now, I can understand that a poor wretch *might* under these circumstances feel in a false position. I should, I know, and should be very glad of the support of a friend, or the opening of a door of escape behind me ; but as for those fellows at tea-parties—but then, you see,’ suddenly remembering that the glorious creature by his side was an entirely new acquaintance, and that to talk to her thus *à cœur ouvert* might be a solecism in good manners—‘ never having found myself at one of those formidable assemblies——’

‘ Which, if you take my advice, you never will——’ broke in Vinca, with a laugh. ‘ Always say “ No ”—civilly if you can—but “ No ” in any case. I particularly request you to avoid *our* teas—mamma’s, that is to say. I shall feel responsible for your entertainment if you don’t, and shall be distressed beyond measure at seeing you look as if you had only come to do the civil thing.’

That Gerald was on the point of saying something very gallant indeed in response to this exhortation, may be taken as a proof that he was not troubled with any extraordinary amount of ‘ backwardness ’ of speech ; and seeing that he as promptly repressed an inclination for which the young lady’s thoughtlessly uttered words

were a very fair excuse, it may also be concluded that the useful gift of knowing intuitively how to guide his tongue with discretion had not been denied to him. But as we must many of us be willing to admit, there is an eloquence in eyes which passes that of words ; and if ever human orbs were gifted with the powers of speech, they were those which Gerald Mainwaring had inherited from the fair woman whose very name he had never heard.

The extraordinary resemblance of Vinca Brudenell to one whose beautiful features were still fresh in his memory, had, at the first moment of meeting, in some sort neutralized the effect of the girl's exceeding loveliness. Recollections of the past had rushed in like a flood upon his mind and heart ; nor was it till many minutes had slipped by, that—the tide of tender memories having begun to ebb—he fully, and with pulses beating as they had never done before, realized the fact that the fairest ‘child of our grandmother Eve’ on whom his eyes had ever rested, was standing by his side.

The drive to Wroxbourne, although, on their return, the ladies were not accompanied by the owner of the grand old park and gardens which they had driven so far to see, proved a great

success, but Aunt Madge took an opportunity to playfully reproach her nephew, in that he had not announced the coming of the party to his grandmother.

“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” was his laughing reply. ‘Grannie, by some means or other, seems to be *au fait* of every domestic event which has occurred, or is likely to occur, at the Abbey. Of course, I do not intend to make a mystery of Mrs. Brudenell’s visit; but if you could but guess, Aunt Madge, how it worries me to be nagged at!’

The sun was setting behind the fir woods when Mrs. Brudenell and her two daughters returned, in high spirits, to Herondale. They had agreed together that the Abbey was, in outward appearance, magnificent, and that the public grounds were well worth seeing. The owner of all this grandeur also—and this was the most cheering consideration of all—showed himself well inclined to further the intimacy which had been thus auspiciously commenced.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

‘ Beauty stands  
In the admiration only of weak minds  
Led captive.’

MILTON.

FROM the moment when Gerald Mainwaring fell heart and soul in love with Vinca Brudenell, Lady Arabella's influence over him was at an end. It was, as I have before said, to the young fellow's indolence, and lack of mental energy that his grandmother had been mainly indebted for the power over him which she had been so ill-advised as to abuse ; and now—now, when every vein was throbbing, and every mental fibre strengthening under the influence of youth's first eager, concentrated passion, the lad who had so long yielded to a tyrannical old woman's sway could have marvelled at—had not his thoughts been otherwise engrossed—and not a little despised himself

for the weakness of character which he had so long displayed.

When Lady Arabella found that her grandson, whilst keeping the word of promise to the ear, broke it to the sense, and was in the habit of spending daily at Herondale some hours of his last week in Marlshire, she grew terribly irate, and more than once, on finding that remonstrances with the recalcitrant one had ceased to have the desired effect, she had been on the point—her temper having got the better of her discretion—of dropping hints regarding the nature of Gerald's obligations to herself, the utterance of which she would afterwards have bitterly regretted. Not being deficient in perspicacity, Lady Arabella found no difficulty in attributing the marked change which had taken place in Gerald, to its true cause—namely, his admiration for the girl, reports of whose extraordinary beauty had not failed to reach her ears; and she determined to (if possible) judge for herself whether or not those reports were exaggerations of the truth.

‘It seems rather a long time since I have paid our friends at Herondale a visit,’ she, on the last morning but one of the Brudenell's stay, diplomatically remarked to her grandson. ‘The day looks promising enough for the open carriage; and as I have had so little of your society of late,

perhaps I may reckon on your accompanying me this afternoon. I dislike a solitary drive, and I have so many lonely hours to look forward to'—this remark being accompanied by a self-pitying sigh—'that really some trifling consideration, after all I have gone through on other people's account, is due to me, and to my wishes.'

'Of course it is, grannie, and more than a trifling one; and I shall be delighted to drive with you to Herondale. You see,' he continued, with somewhat diminished fluency, 'that the Brudenells may be hurt—may think that—that you are not as really kind as you are, if you were not to call upon them——'

'Which I certainly should not think of doing,' said her ladyship loftily. 'My visit is to the Fieldens, and to them alone; and I hope there may be no shadow of misunderstanding about the matter. It is not customary, I believe, to call upon strangers, and I have no acquaintance whatever with the persons you have mentioned.'

After this slightly aggressive speech, it is scarcely surprising that Gerald should, dearly as he loved to look upon blue-eyed Vinca's face, have devoutly wished that, on the occasion of his grandmother's visit to Herondale, the Brudenell family would, one and all, be not at home.



But in this hope he was fated to be disappointed, for, after proceeding some distance along the 'approach,' they came upon a small herd of feeding deer, whose dainty heads were scarcely raised from the short, fresh herbage as the carriage passed, whilst within easy-sketching distance, and sheltered from the sun's rays by the spreading branches of a sycamore-tree, sat, pencil in hand, and in a very becoming and graceful costume, Miss Vinca Brudenell.

The consequence of this sudden apparition was to Lady Arabella extremely startling; for Gerald, in the agitation which the sight of the young lady produced upon his nerves, temporarily overlooked the presence of his autocratic relative, and called to the coachman to stop.

'What for?' hastily exclaimed the lady. 'My dear boy, what are you thinking of? Evans,' to the broad-shouldered retainer, sitting silent and motionless on his box, 'drive——'

But almost before the order to 'move on' had been spoken, Gerald, with a hasty apology, had sprung from the carriage, and with his hand on the door said pleadingly:

'It is Miss Vinca Brudenell, grannie, who is under the tree, and I should be *so* glad if you did not mind being introduced to her. She draws quite beautifully—you should see her sketches,

and grannie dear—' coaxingly, and with a sunny smile lighting up his perfect features—'you would like her if you knew her ; she——'

'Don't talk to me about liking her. I have told you already, Gerald, that I do not wish to know these people. They have come here, I believe, on purpose to——but don't provoke me to say any more, I know the world a little better than you do, and would gladly warn you against designing persons ; but if you choose to take up with——'

At this point in her harangue Lady Arabella was suddenly struck by the strange pallor which had diffused itself over her grandson's face, and in sudden alarm, for the boy was very dear to her, she ejaculated anxiously :

'What is the matter, dear ? Are you ill ? Do you feel any pain ?'

'None whatever, thanks ; but,' lowering his voice, and still speaking in the cold, altered tones with which he had replied to his relation's agitated queries, 'I think it would be as well to remember that servants have ears, and refrain from speaking of such things aloud when they are within hearing. I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long. Evans, her ladyship wishes you to drive on to the house ;' and having so said, the offender raised his hat, and the next minute was by Vinca's side.

‘How long she has kept you ! and how cross she seemed !’ were the young lady’s first remarks, after she and Gerald had shaken hands. ‘What was it all about ? And what ’—glancing up saucily into his face—‘ makes you look as if you would like to punch somebody’s head ?’

‘Nothing, excepting that the horses went such a snail’s pace, and that I hate being driven by a coachman,’ said Gerald, who, leaning his shoulder against the friendly tree, was endeavouring to recover his self-command.

‘A clear case of crumpled rose leaves,’ rejoined Vinca placidly, as, with her small uncovered head on one side, she surveyed the sketch she had commenced. ‘Do you know,’ she continued, still without looking at her companion, and speaking with emphatic gravity, ‘what you have set me thinking about?’

‘No, indeed ; but I hope that it is nothing very, *very* much against me. I am not an ill-tempered fellow generally, but there are some things——’

‘Which no fellow can stand—or *understand*? Which was it ? I forget, and it doesn’t the least signify. What I was going to say is this : When I hear people who are rich and comfortable, who have never known a care, or a trouble, and who have carriages and horses, and everything they want, complaining of just nothing at all——’

‘But it wasn’t just nothing at all.’

‘Wasn’t it? I call hating driving slowly nothing, and—but now,’ suddenly turning her head, and fixing the eyes which had already made such havoc with Gerald’s heart, upon *his* expressive face, ‘do tell, as the Yankee girls say, had not you and that determined-looking old lady been having a—shall you be angry now, I wonder, if I call it a scrimmage?’

She looked so pretty and so *piquante*, as the last word—one so especially and ludicrously inapplicable to Lady Arabella—escaped her lips, that Gerald could not choose but laugh.

‘Well, yes,’ he said, and as he did so he abandoned the support of the tree stem, and seated himself, a little shyly, on the turf by her side. ‘We *had* a small difference—nothing of importance; and now, won’t you let me see the sketch, and how you have succeeded with the deer?’

‘Oh, it was of no use; they wouldn’t stand still, and besides, I want to show you how clever I am at guessing. Now, I wish to know, and’—holding up a warning finger—‘you must tell me the exact truth: were you not asking Lady Arabella to be introduced to me?’

Gerald, feeling dreadfully guilty, as well as painfully aware that his confusion must be evident to the merciless girl beside him, is never-

theless constrained to admit that her surmise is a true one.

‘And if she had agreed to be so condescending, it was your intention’—still looking with smiling frankness into her victim’s southern eyes—‘to call me up to the foot of the throne—I mean to the door of the carriage—for presentation?’

‘Yes,’ faltered Gerald, ‘I—I thought you would not mind, and——’

‘But I *should* have minded,’ interrupted Vinca, her cheek flushing, and her blue eyes aglow with excitement. ‘I should have *minded* so much that cart-ropes would not have dragged me to the—the operation. I only wish she *had* agreed, and then she would have learned a lesson that might have done her good. But I beg your pardon—I ought not to be angry with *you*. You must think me very passionate and rude; but if you had ever known what it is to be poor, and to be patronized by ill-bred fine ladies, you would wonder at me less. They are quite different from the real *grandes dames*, who think it no disgrace to be poor, and who are kind and natural and genial. But you’ll forgive me, won’t you?’ and the smallest of soft womanly hands is forthwith suiting the action to the words, and extending itself in token of amity to the young man at her side.

If at the touch of those sensitive, ungloved fingers, poor Gerald's senses for a moment or two forsake him, who amongst us can wonder? 'Man is fire and woman tow,' so saith the proverb, and Vinca ought not to have been, and perhaps, indeed, was not surprised at the lengthened pressure of the strong but lissom fingers upon hers. Possibly, too, *her* pulses beat somewhat quicker for the contact; but if this were so, the novel sensation had the effect of putting a sudden end to the situation.

'I think we've been looking at those stupid deer long enough,' she—abruptly withdrawing her hand, and rising to her feet—remarks. 'I wish I had something to show for all the time we have been out. Thanks—the cardboard in the portfolio, please. Oh dear,' as she replaces Aunt Madge's battered garden hat upon her dark shining hair, 'what would Cousin Honoria say if she saw me now, and knew what I have been about!'

'And who is Cousin Honoria?' asks Gerald, who is still in a state of semi-bewilderment, and whose question is simply the result of a certain embarrassing consciousness that he has that to conceal which he would not for worlds have known.

'Oh, Cousin Honoria is a terrible woman.

She loves nobody, does not care the least about being loved herself, and likes to make everyone afraid of her.'

'And are you afraid of her?' Gerald—glancing down at the bright, care-defying face—inquires.

'Y—yes—I am a little, I suppose, although it is not pleasant to own it. Mamma *is*, dreadfully. You see, she is a relation of poor papa's, and they didn't like the marriage because there was no money, and Cousin Honoria does so thoroughly despise poor people.'

'It would serve her right to lose all her money,' Gerald indignantly responds.

'Wouldn't it? By one fell swoop! But there will be no such luck, I am afraid. You should have heard her when she used to bully mamma! How the poor thing could bear it, I was never able to understand. Something was said once about our taking a little place—after poor papa's death, you know—near where Cousin Honoria lives, and she kindly made out a list of the people we were to be intimate with. You would hardly believe it, it seems so almost impossible for a woman to be so unfeeling and so rude, but she actually wrote the names of all the families which, on *her* coming into the neighbourhood, she had treated *de haut en bas*, and declined to know, whilst the few whom *she* thought worthy

to associate with were left out altogether from the catalogue of those who were considered by her as well suited to persons so vastly inferior to herself as were her husband's down-in-the-world connections.'

Vinca had begun this little tirade calmly enough, but as she proceeded to relate at length her grievances, her colour deepened, the rounded girlish bosom rose and fell, and it became tolerably clear—especially to herself—that she was permitting the memory of insults, which, however numerous, were in reality unworthy of even a passing thought, to draw her into an unseemly display of temper. The idea was far from an agreeable one, and the less so, seeing that she knew too little of her companion's character and habits of thought for any notion as to how he would 'take' her imprudent outburst, to be rationally formed by her. A girl, however, on whom nature has lavished a more than average amount of beauty, rarely (if she be one who is fully conscious of her own good gifts) feels herself to be in a thoroughly awkward position. After a few minutes given to reflection, Vinca breaks into a laugh.

'How cantankerous you must think me,' she says cheerfully. 'Fancy my telling you all about our family troubles! I don't know what mamma



would say if she knew how confidential I have been. You must forget all I have said, and when you come to see us in Graye Street, where we are going to live, you——Well, perhaps you won't believe a word about our being poor.'

Her eyes are turned full on Gerald's speaking countenance. Again the same bewildering expression—half-appealing and half-defiant—lurks in her glance, and stirs his spirit to its depths.

'I shall always believe every word that *you* say to me,' he rejoins impetuously; 'and if—if you will allow me to come and see you in London——'

'Oh, of course you will come and see us! only I must take great heed to my words, if, as you say, you are going to believe them all. What a responsibility it will be! I shall almost be afraid to open my lips before you.'

'Oh, I hope not,' he falters. 'I hope you will talk a great deal. Your voice is—is like music, and I would rather hear your laugh than the best song that ever Patti or Albani sang.'

'Now, I wonder,' the girl says thoughtfully, 'how much truth there is in *that*. I don't profess, you know, to be so credulous as you are. But never mind, now. We must hurry on, or even Mrs. Fielden, who is always so good-natured,

I think I am doing something "fast." Your  
nt Madge is—shall you be shocked if I say  
'brick?' But then she is like somebody's  
l, always in two places at once, and there are  
chances to one against our finding her in the  
ise.'





## CHAPTER XIX.

‘Our wills and fates do so contrary run,  
That our devices still are overthrown.’

SHAKESPEARE

‘My dear, where *have* you been? And what a figure you are!’ exclaimed Mrs. Brudenell, as Vinca, looking her very loveliest, entered the drawing-room, where Lady Arabella was seated half-way between Mrs. Fielden and that lady’s guest and cousin, the great lady meanwhile, doing her very best to ignore altogether the presence of the latter.

Now Mrs. Brudenell had undergone too often the painful sensation of being, metaphorically speaking, ‘sat upon,’ not to dearly love the inflicting upon others the same unpleasant operation. It is a mistake to suppose that *all* those who have in their own persons endured sorrow, are of necessity capable of sympathy, and ever tender of the woes of others. It is often simply

an affair of temperament. There are boys who, with a lively recollection of the pains and penalties which *fagging* under a severe task-master entails, are careful, when they rise in their school, and have, in their turn, 'slaves' under them, not only of the little fellows' comfort, but even of their principles, and of their health. There be others, on the contrary, who, having felt the smart of tyrannous rule, and endured torture at the hands of a school bully, can devise no better means of satisfying the lust for revenge which burns within their breasts, than that of, in their turn, inflicting pain on, and causing misery to, the luckless little chap whose hard fate it is to be the 'fag' of a public-school despot.

Mrs. Brudenell had been eagerly watching for her daughter's entrance. Fully conscious of Mrs. Fielden's well-bred attempts to make the conversation general, she had endured with outward calm, but with internal rage and bitterness, the manner in which Lady Arabella, who was in her own opinion a very great lady indeed, tacitly resisted every attempt to entrap her into intimacy with her fellow-guest. The *mauvais quart d'heure* which the latter was now passing, had in it elements of annoyance which she was little likely in after days to forget, and it is tolerably certain that should an opportunity for taking her revenge

ever arise, Mrs. Brudenell was not the woman to let it slip, unimproved, out of her hands.

Vinca, greatly to the uncomfortably situated lady's relief, at last made her appearance, closely followed by Gerald Mainwaring. She had thrown, on her entrance, Aunt Madge's hat upon the hall-table, and the picturesque disarrangement of her hair (a disarrangement which Mrs. Brudenell afterwards spoke of as causing the pretty head which it adorned to look as if it had been dragged through a gooseberry-bush) had the effect of adding to the striking character of the young lady's face and figure.

'My dear, where *have* you been? And what a figure you are!'

'I have been trying to sketch some deer, only they *would* shake their heads, and Miss Fielden's hat wouldn't keep straight on my head,' replied Vinca coolly, and then, seating herself near a table which stood at some little distance from the rest of the company, she drew towards her a large glass vase filled with choice hot-house flowers, and commenced re-arranging them according to her fancy.

Meanwhile Gerald, after having been affectionately greeted and duly kissed by Mrs. Fielden, turns, without delay, to the silent and far from pleasant-looking lady to whom his

grandmother is evidently giving a lesson in the—to some persons—difficult art of knowing ‘their own place.’

When the greetings are over, he says, half-shyly :

‘ We came upon Miss Brudenell when she was sketching under the old sycamore-tree. It was delicious there, so sheltered from the wind——’

‘ How can you say so, Mr. Mainwaring ?’ the girl puts in saucily, whilst the soft laughter of early youth comes rippling from her rosy lips. ‘ You know it blew the old hat off twice, and scattered the drawing-paper all about.’

‘ Ah, but that was while we were walking home,’ laughs Gerald, as, in open defiance of Lady Arabella’s frowns, he seats himself by his fellow-offender’s side, and commences, in a tone too low for its subject to be distinctly heard, a conversation which, judging from the sparkling eyes and the flattering interest betrayed by rising colour in the one of the pair whose countenance is open to observation, can hardly be quite of a commonplace description.

Gerald has prudently placed himself in a position which, to a certain extent, secures him from remark, and he speedily becomes far too deeply engrossed by his present occupation, namely, that of making the agreeable to playful, *piquante*

Vinca, for any recollection of his grandmother's displeasure to cross his mind. Mrs. Brudenell looks on at the *tête-à-tête* triumphantly. Her unerring female instinct tells her that the couch on which Lady Arabella's ample person is seated, is for her, stuffed with thorns. The rapid progress in intimacy with the 'fast' and 'forward' girl (as doubtless her ladyship considers Vinca to be) which Gerald has made, must have come—at least so the lookers-on feel convinced—upon his grandmother with the shock of a terrible surprise. Mrs. Brudenell had herself marvelled not a little at the rapidity with which the young owner of Wroxbourne had cast off the slight symptoms of shyness and indecision which, on his first introduction to them, she had remarked; how little then could Lady Arabella have been prepared for the sight which now met her eyes! For Gerald had indeed thrown off the yoke by which he had been so long oppressed, and had at length burst the chain which had bound him to his grandmother's apron-strings!

Mrs. Brudenell's exultation at the sight of her enemy's discomfiture was not—at that moment, at least — altogether caused by the prospect of an advantageous marriage for Vinca, which Gerald Mainwaring's marked attentions held out. Her keen sense of present wrong, the natural

resistance to being trodden on, which causes even the mildest amongst us (and Mrs. Brudenell was very far from being either mild or meek) to turn against the oppressor, was thrilling through every vein ; and each time that Vinca's joyous peal of laughter rang

‘ Without any control  
Save the sweet one of gracefulness,’

through the occasionally silent room, the mother, glancing surreptitiously but with eager interest at her foe, could see that the iron of a broken sceptre was entering into Milady's soul.

The sensation given by the probe was certainly not a pleasant one. Lady Arabella was a woman of experience. She had once in her life, a fact which a casual looker-on might find it hard to believe, found herself in juxtaposition with a lover of her own. The event had happened long ago, and yet, for the reason that with her, such memories were few in number, the details of it were indelibly graven on her mind. She could not see her grandson's face, but that attitude of his—the elbow resting on the knee, and the fingers of the left hand supporting his head, whilst they concealed the features of the rebel from observation—recalled so forcibly to her mind a scene in which, half a century before, *she*



had played the *prima donna's* part, that she at once arrived at the conclusion that the flirting 'girl of the period,' who was setting all decency at defiance, had succeeded for the moment in turning her grandson's head.

'But it *shall* not last,' she imperiously told herself, as, drawing her rustling garments together, she prepared herself for the coming battle. 'Such a creature as that shall *never* be mistress of Wroxbourne.'

As she registered this inward vow, Lady Arabella, rising with much dignity from her seat, expressed a wish—which sounded like a command—to have her carriage ordered. At the sound of the deep authoritative voice, Gerald, who had, *pro tem.*, forgotten her very existence, sprung from his chair. For a second or two something approaching to his old sense of serfdom kept him silent. The feeling was, however, an evanescent one. A glance from Vinca's mocking eyes helped to send it to the winds, for the lad was not by nature a moral coward. It was long 'use,' as I have before hinted, which had 'bred' in him the 'habit' of almost unquestioning obedience, and had led those who were but imperfectly acquainted with his real character to conclude that he had 'no character at all.'

'Are you really going, grannie?' he said

brightly. 'I am so sorry. Miss Brudenell and I were talking of a game at lawn-tennis, and if you did not mind staying half-an-hour longer, we might——'

'Begin the game, I suppose. Thanks, but I think the horses have rested long enough. Mrs. Fielden, may I order the carriage round? And Gerald, will you have the kindness'—this with exceeding majesty and stiffness—'to ring the bell.'

The which Gerald did, whispering to Miss Vinca as he passed her chair:

'I was afraid there would be no use trying. I haven't a chance, you see.'

'But I don't see it,' whispered in return the young lady, whose eyes, as they were turned full upon her fellow delinquent, decidedly meant mischief. 'Why must *you* go away because she does? Couldn't you stay? You have been here later than this on other days.'

'I *could*—but then——'

'Oh! if you *can*, there is no reason why you shouldn't. It will be such fun! Mr. Willoughby promised to come, and we can't have the game without you. Lady Arabella can never be so ill-natured as to refuse you leave.'

This last sentence did more—little as pretty Vinca suspected that so it was—towards inducing

Gerald to resist his grandmother's authority than all the pleasant-sounding pleadings which had gone before. He was young enough to cordially detest, and utterly rebel against, the notion of being coerced. To have it supposed by *anyone* that he did not possess a 'will of his own' brought a blush of shame to the boy's still beardless cheeks; but that *she*, the peerless being whose joyous spirits so plainly bore witness to the fearlessness of her nature, should imagine him capable of being ruled over, and frightened into submission by his grandmother, was a state of things to which he could not bring himself to tamely yield. Fired, then, with the laudable ambition of asserting his claim to manhood and to independence, he said with a laugh, which Vinca was quite 'quick' enough to perceive was hardly a natural one:

'I will certainly stay if you wish it;' whilst to Lady Arabella he said, with a courage that surprised himself: 'I am going to ask you to excuse my driving back with you, grannie. I meant to do so, but——'

'But we want Mr. Mainwaring so much here,' broke in audacious Vinca. 'Four's company at lawn-tennis, and three's none——'

'And I will be back in time for dinner,' put in Gerald hastily, for he dreaded the sharp

rejoinder which he felt certain was on his grandmother's lips. 'If you will tell Andrews to bring the dog-cart——'

'Nonsense! The dog-cart indeed!' Why, it is past four now——'

'Yes, indeed, Lady Arabella,' ejaculated Mrs. Fielden, 'it is growing quite late. Had *you* not better be persuaded to remain and have some tea with us? The young people will not be long over their game, and I am sure that Gerald will be happier not to let you return home alone.'

She spoke—although the departing guest was with her no favourite—kindly as well as hospitably. Hard and cold as the excellent woman knew Lady Arabella to be, she—Mrs. Fielden being one of those large-hearted amongst God's creatures who do not measure out their compassion according to the merits of the sufferer—felt much pity for her old acquaintance and neighbour, and that not only on account of the present annoyance, which, with so many pairs of eyes fixed on her angry face, her ladyship was enduring, but for the reason that (as all save herself were able to perceive) clouds were gathering in the dim horizon of her life.

Mrs. Fielden, who had lost a child by death, could image to herself the bitter pain which

separation of another kind would—when the bond between her and Gerald was finally broken—inflict upon the aged woman to whom her grandson was in truth her all in life; and impressed with this foreboding thought, she again pressed her invitation on her guest—but all in vain. Lady Arabella, clothed in her stiffest armour of resolve, but with a tugging at her heart-strings, the pain of which only herself could estimate, went her way, leaving the enemy—for the rout was certainly complete—in triumphant possession of the field of battle.





## CHAPTER XX.

‘Life is a journey ;—on we go  
Thro’ many a scene of joy and woe.’

*Dr. Syntax's Tour.*

COLONEL DUART BRUDENELL had during his life-time been, as I should have before said, a man well considered by the world in which he had borne a part. He had seen much service, and was recognised in his profession as a gallant, as well as a successful soldier. As a civilian, and in private life, his career had been less fortunate. He married a clergyman's daughter, whose fortune of £5,000 proved for her husband, in many ways, a somewhat unfortunate possession ; for, on the strength of it, the lady assumed airs of superiority, and betrayed a strength of will which greatly militated against the comfort of her household.

Of the four daughters, concerning whose future

provision Colonel Brudenell had during his lifetime been almost morbidly anxious, one—the Vinca of whom mention has already been made, and who, at the death of her father, had reached the age of seventeen—was, as I have said, strikingly beautiful. Her eyes, perfect in shape and size, were of the same vivid blue as those which had made the chief attraction of Lilian Fielden's face, and the latter, having been the infant's god-mother, had suggested the name of Vinca as one that suited well the little creature's especial gift of beauty. Mabel was the third girl, and Rosie, the youngest of the quartette, was still in—what was called by courtesy—the schoolroom when Colonel Brudenell's death in India left his children orphans. At the time that melancholy and wholly unexpected event occurred, Mrs. Brudenell and her daughters were located in a lodging at Southsea. Their income was small, for though the Colonel's pay had been large—he having, partly to escape from home troubles, accepted a distant lucrative command—the premium on his life insurance deducted very considerably from his profits. Under these circumstances, and seeing that a taste for ostentation and display was inherent in the temporary head of the family, it is reasonable to conclude that their lodging-house life was not especially wanting in the varieties of discomfort

and annoyance which usually attend that species of *oiseau sur la branche* existence.

To Mary, the eldest of the Colonel's daughters, and who had, from various causes been her father's especial favourite and companion, the struggle to appear wealthier and of greater 'consequence' than they were, had been a fruitful source of regret and mortification. Of good looks she, with the exception of her share of youth's fleeting comeliness, possessed but little; but ample amends was made for this deficiency by the sweetness of her disposition, her good sense, and the genuine humility which marked her character. These qualities had, however, signally failed in securing to her the love and confidence of her mother. Jealousy is, as I think most observers of human nature will be ready to admit, quite compatible with an entire absence of affection for the person on whose account the evil passion in question has been aroused. Mrs. Brudenell had long ceased to love the husband whose character differed in all essential points from her own; but, even whilst making in her own person no efforts either to raise his opinion of her merits, or to render his home more agreeable to him, she viewed with extreme displeasure Mary's unconsciously obtained influence, and the daily increasing confidence which her father reposed in



her. Meanwhile, the poor girl's days were, during Colonel Brudenell's long and frequent absences, anything but halcyon ones. She was conscious, although ignorant of the cause thereof, that she was an object of almost dislike to her mother, nor was she able to take comfort in the companionship of her sisters; thence there naturally followed for her habits of serious thought, and of lonely and doubtless salutary self-communing. On the dear absent father, who understood her so thoroughly, and would always enter with womanly tenderness into her sorrows, her mind was ever dwelling, and the looking forward to his return was the one bright speck in the dim horizon of her life.

When the melancholy intelligence that the Colonel had died suddenly of heart disease reached Southsea, Mary's health, which had never been strong, almost failed beneath the shock. She strove hard—for *his* sake, for *he* would have pointed to that line of duty—to bow with meek submission to the decree which had gone forth; but under the effort the weak brain reeled, and the sufferer lay for a while fever-stricken and unconscious. Whilst the girl's life still hung as it were upon a thread, Mrs. Brudenell was not fortunate enough to escape some prickings of remorse, whilst a tardy tenderness for

the child whom she had failed to appreciate, caused her to watch for a time, with real anxiety, by the girl's bed of pain. Very thankful, too, was the newly-made widow for the visits on Mary's behalf of Mr. Delafield, an excellent 'High Church'—as it is called—clergyman, who, together with his excellent wife, not only by their counsels and their care supported the sufferer through the first days of woe and desolation, but who—unwearied in well-doing—invited the melancholy convalescent to their home in Stoneyshire, where, in following out the rules bequeathed to us by Him whose ears were never deaf to the voice of the sorrowful, these two childless pilgrims on life's highway *worked* out their salvation with cheerfulness and trust. Mary had been for nearly a year the welcome inmate of their home, when Mrs. Brudenell, who had endured with considerable impatience her twelve-months' period of 'decent' seclusion, prepared herself in earnest for the delightful duty of presenting her lovely daughter to the London world.

In order to do this with 'effect,' and consequently with some chance of success in the undertaking, the '*means*' at her disposal were 'limited'—the meaning, by the way, of the said expression being, as I take it, simply this, namely, that a desire to 'cut a dash' is checked


by the narrowness of the income. Now, I think it will be generally admitted that, in order to make even a moderate figure in London—in order, for instance, to rent a small house in May Fair, and to keep up an ‘establishment,’ however scanty therein—in order also to *job* even a single-horse brougham, or other vehicle, for the season, and to give afternoon teas *ad libitum*—something more in the way of rent-roll (supposing always that the bills are paid) than eight hundred pounds is requisite. Now the income of Mrs. Duart Brudenell (there being a Lord Duart, who was the late Colonel’s distant cousin and godfather, his widow, not unnaturally, clung to the double [name] certainly did not exceed the amount I have just mentioned; but then she was a woman who, as her friends said, ‘knew very well what she was about,’ and thence it followed that, undismayed by the possession of four daughters, who at her death would be very slenderly provided for, the Colonel’s widow boldly determined to enter—for the good of her family, as she believed—on a career of speculation and adventure. In order that the ‘beauty’ of the family might have her chance of marrying a rich and influential man, her mother—well aware of the advantage, even to the finest diamond, of a becoming setting—resolved upon, and carried

into execution, the plan of 'selling out' so much of her small capital as would enable her to accomplish her project. Of the wrong she was doing to her other children she never thought, or if the idea did happen to cross her mind that in the only too probable event of *their* remaining single, the comparatively small sum for which the Colonel had insured his life would be all they would have to depend upon, she doubtless consoled herself with the reflection that the money thus sunk in a scheme of greed and ambition was her own, and that it was for *their* ultimate benefit that the deed was done.

Mrs. Brudenell did not, as might have been the case with some mothers, deem it necessary to keep Vinca in the dark, either regarding her 'circumstances' or her plans.

'I hope, and indeed believe, that the money will not be thrown away,' she had said, with something like severity, to her daughter, and the latter, casting her blue eyes triumphantly at the mirror above the chimney-piece, had responded:

'Well, mamma, I can't help it if it should be so. You see, a girl can't ask a man to marry her. However, of course I shall do my best, if it were only because of Mary. She really ought to marry a clergyman soon. If she does not, she will get *goodier* and *goodier* till no one will be able to live with her at all.'



‘You ought to be very thankful,’ suggested Mrs. Brudenell, ‘that Mary has taken that turn. It would have been most inconvenient if she had gone in for society. Being the eldest, what *could* we have done? Now, before Mabel is old enough to be presented——’

‘I shall have made the fortunes of the family. Ten thousand a year at the very least, five hundred ditto pin-money, a living in *his* gift for Mary, and who knows?—even poor dear Mabel may come in for something good.’

It was thus that the light-hearted beauty commented on the *rôle* which was given her to play, and Mrs. Brudenell, who would have felt a great, although unacknowledged, difficulty in talking over with her elder daughter any plans for that young person’s advancement in life, saw no reason to regret that she had taken the more worldly-minded and ambitious Vinca into her confidence.

The furnished house, which the Colonel’s widow, at a ruinous cost, hired for the season, was situated in Graye Street, Grosvenor Square. It was dark, ill-arranged, small, and generally disreputable-looking; but then the situation! So close to the most aristocratic square in London! So ‘near the rose,’ in short, that if No. 52 did happen to be a trifle stuffy and

unsavoury, its proximity to all that was bright, splendid, and alluring, so neutralized all standing evils, that even the disreputable corner 'public,' which displayed its shameless front within two doors of Mrs. Brudenell's temporary home, was treated, by reason of the locality in which it found itself, with an amount of toleration which it was far from meriting.

She being a woman of resource, it followed that the new tenant of 52, Graye Street, spared no expense in order to render the interior of that abode *presentable*. The drawing-room carpets, which the girls had from the first moment of their introduction to them pronounced to be 'too horrible,' were partially concealed by sundry squares of Persian or Turkish fabric. Then there were rugs of foreign manufacture judiciously laid down where the tramp of feet, and the dust and smoke of years, had in many places worked the well-worn 'Brussels' carpets threadbare, and rendered dim the mimic flowers, which, erst gorgeous in colouring, as they were still brobdignagian in dimensions, had in days gone by been, in all probability, the pride and glory of their owners. Many a London 'season' had come and gone since first No. 52, Graye Street, had been 'let furnished' to London visitors, and

Time, as is its wont, had told severely upon all that had been once (it was just possible to believe) bright and fresh and clean. Still—and ‘heaven be praised,’ said the girls, ‘for that mercy’—it was not a lodging! At their age, and educated as well as ill-exampled as they had been, it was little likely that they should either perceive or dwell upon the imprudence on their mother’s part of risking *le tout pour le tout*, in order that Vinca’s *début* in London should make a sensation, and lead to satisfactory pecuniary results. It was sufficient for the thoughtless, light-hearted damsels, whose experiences of lodging-house dirt, discomfort, and (in their opinion) degradation, had been great and varied, that the ‘door’ in Graye Street was not to be ‘answered’ by a bold-seeming, uncleanly-looking specimen of London low life, in the shape of a ‘general servant,’ and that *now*, gentlemen callers, of whom they hoped to welcome many in their improved abode, would be announced in orthodox fashion by an ‘indoors man.’

Vinca had attained the age of eighteen, when—immediately after Easter—she, with an entirely renovated wardrobe, commenced in London the struggle, against overwhelming odds, for a high place and position in the world. That many a (woman’s) hand would be against her, was a

fact which she—taught by her own instincts, as well as by her mother's experience—fully recognised. They—that is to say, the female portion of 'Society'—had nothing apparently to gain by the intrusion into their midst of impecunious Mrs. Brudenell and her daughters. They were well connected, and as such, might be entitled to some sort of notice from those who could not fairly deny the claim of the widow to be treated with civility by the higher-placed ones who were of her not distant kindred. But, whilst tacitly admitting such claim, the said kindred agreed amongst themselves that anything like intimacy with the Graye Street family was not to be thought of. There was a savour of Bohemianism, or, in other words, of 'limited means,' about the Duart Brudenells that was decidedly objectionable; and then—greater evil still—they were all women! If there had only been a brother—poor and unprofitable as he, as a matter of course, must have been—it would have made a difference; but five females! And the sex already so overplentifully represented! The case was really a monstrous one, and invitations to the dwellers No. 52 were likely in consequence to be very few and far between.

Amongst the earliest visitors to Graye Street was Gerald Mainwaring, who on the wings of a



first and truly passionate love had lost no time in following his so-called relatives to town, and who, when there, had done his utmost to make his suit acceptable. By all the ladies he was warmly and affectionately welcomed—welcomed, however, more as a friend and cousin, than as a prospective suitor; for Mrs. Brudenell, being wise in her generation, was careful to avoid all ostensible conduct which might lead to her conviction as a husband-hunter. So careful, indeed, was she of appearances, that in a moment of abstraction she over-played her part, by pointing out to Vinca a few well-nigh imaginary defects in the character of that young lady's devoted admirer. The reply of the *demoiselle* was both characteristic and to the point.

'Well,' she said calmly, and whilst scanning with much satisfaction her perfect features in a hand mirror that stood prominently forward on one of the Graye Street occasional tables, 'I have no doubt you are right. Mr. Mainwaring certainly is not very energetic, and he might possibly bore his wife by hanging too much about the house. But then he is so wonderfully good to look at! A "lovely man," as the Yankee girls say, and handsome, in my opinion—(what shall I say?)—as paint.'

Mrs. Brudenell heaved a well-got-up sigh, as

she said, by way of rejoinder, 'I quite agree with you, my dear, as to his good looks ; but beauty is to both sexes a great snare, and an exceeding source of temptation to do wrong, and thereby bring down misfortune on its possessor.'

'There are very few misfortunes, in my opinion,' laughed Vinca, 'which a man with twenty thousand a year cannot make head against. Why, if Gerald were as ugly as sin, which—say what they will—is not so very frightful——'

'My dear Vinca——'

'But it is quite true. Sin is very far from being an 'ugly' thing. If there were not so many *jolis pêchés* capable of committal, people would not be so tempted to be bad. But I was going to say of Mr. Mainwaring, that Nature has made him so terribly good, that neither beauty nor deformity can cause him to be other than he is.'

At the period when this conversation took place, Vinca had been presented at Court, and had already taken her place amongst the Beauties of the season. Gerald Mainwaring was decidedly the most favoured of the many aspirants for her smiles, and the absence of all competition on the part of her elder sister, who was generally supposed to be 'serious,' and therefore an enemy to balls and gaieties, was—as Mrs. Brudenell had justly remarked—a circumstance for which she and her girls had great reason to be thankful.



## CHAPTER XXI.

‘It beareth the name of Vanity Fair, because where ‘tis kept is lighter than vanity.’—BUNYAN (*Pilgrim’s Progress*).

As might have been safely predicted, Vinca Brudenell’s attractions produced a sensation in London. There was much to be said in favour of her chance of ultimate success, for she was gifted—in addition to a lovely face—with a fine figure, and with the pretty playful ‘ways’ which, in some inscrutable manner, lead men, with whom girls who possess such a gift converse, to the conviction that in *themselves* lies the valuable art of pleasing.

But as a set-off against these advantages there existed more than one drawback. Miss Brudenell was known to be portionless, and was more than suspected of being extravagant. She was incautious, too, and apt, by reason of an ill-governed tongue and a quick sense of the ridi-

culous, to give unintentional offence, not only to her female but to her male acquaintances. That she was an adept at flirtation (that 'most significant word,' as Lord Chesterfield called it) was a fact very generally believed and accepted, and it is just possible that the said belief might have been amongst the causes why so few admirers *pour le bon motif* entered the lists for beautiful Vinca's favour.

Well does the girl herself recognise the truth that marriage is for her a necessity, and in her heart of hearts she bitterly laments one other truth, namely, that the man to whom her love is given is one who, even if he were, like Barkis of old, 'willing,' cannot, he being a 'poor man,' indulge in the costly luxury of such a wife as Vinca would infallibly prove to be. Lord Arthur Clayton (for such is his designation) is whispering low beside her in the shabby Graye Street drawing-room, in which, greatly against Mrs. Brudenell's wish, so many of his leisure hours are, but ought not—a fact of which he is fully cognizant—to be passed; *ought* not, inasmuch as he sees with prophetic eyes that the time is not far distant when the free *entrée* to that room will no longer be regarded by him as a privilege, and—— Well, when I say that Lord Arthur is at the present moment making the most of the

time which yet remains to him, I am hardly, methinks, doing him an injustice.

There is little to admire in the dark face which is leaning very near to Vinca's, Mrs. Brudenell, the while, being seated at a distant writing-table, with lines of care gathering on her brow. Lord Arthur is tall, and slightly, though strongly made. There is not one good feature in his face excepting his eyes, but they possess the strange magnetic power which causes him to be one of the many dangerous men, who, since the world grew 'refined,' and tastes became fastidious, have had a strong and almost morbid fascination for the other sex.

It is the month of June ; the weather is more than usually oppressive, and Vinca, slightly flushed by the heat, is looking, in her gossamer muslin dress (by lace and ribbon plentifully adorned), in brilliant beauty.

'You expect him, of course. When is he coming? I hate half confidences——' and Lord Arthur, much of whose 'success' lies in the imperious parlance, as well as position, which, with women he often assumes, looks into her eyes, with his own so full of passionate tenderness, that the flush on the girl's cheek deepens, and she finds it impossible to meet his gaze.

'Why can you not look at me?' he whispers

tenderly. 'You will have eyes for that fellow Mainwaring when he comes! With him you are always ready to talk and laugh, but with me—ah, Vinca!' and his voice, always soft and tender, falls lower still, 'whilst I am hungering for a single glance from those blue eyes which are my heaven, you keep them for one who——'

But at this juncture the eloquence of Vinca's favourite admirer is suddenly interrupted, for the door opens, and Gerald is, by Mrs. Brudenell's well-trained 'single-handed' servant, duly announced. The great and sudden change which, on his entrance, takes place in Vinca's manner, neither surprises nor angers the man who, but a minute previously, had poured into her not unwilling ear words of passionate devotion. Full well he knows that it is by reason of the tumult in the heart whose depths he has sounded, that she cannot—dare not—meet his gaze, whilst Gerald Mainwaring, who, poor young fellow, has got so much to learn, suns himself in her smiles, and daily gathers, from the frankness of her speech, and the cordiality of her welcome, renewed and soul-entrancing hopes.

For it has come to this, that every inflammably component particle of Gerald Mainwaring's southern blood has been fired by the contemplation of Vinca's beauty—by the touch of her

hand, and the sound of her soft rippling laughter. He cannot—nay, more, he *will* not—he swears to himself—live without her. In the madness of his passion, when none of mortal shape and form can hear his words, he utters to the winds a vow that if he cannot gain Vinca for his own, existence in this world and he, will shake hands and part ; and if—but at the bare thought—at the faintest notion that another than he may gain her love, such dread and murderous thoughts rise up within his naturally kind and gentle breast, as go far to transform the man who nourishes them into a malefactor and an assassin.

Something of this, Lord Arthur, who is a shrewd judge of human character, has more than an inkling of. He is no coward ; but there is a certain amount of what we may almost designate as *fear*, which even the boldest of men cannot always suppress when they come in contact with a nature such as Gerald's—a nature in which the animal, untamed and untameable, so greatly predominates over the intellectual, that, when the provocation to violence becomes sufficiently strong, the unchained winds are as easy of mastery as is the man whom a temporary madness governs. Impressed with the idea that Gerald Mainwaring would, were the passion of jealousy to be once aroused within him, prove a

very inconvenient and troublesome rival, Lord Arthur had been especially careful to conceal from the man who *could* afford to marry a penniless wife, the game which he—the younger son of an impecunious marquis—was playing. With this object in view, he had even gone the length of establishing a certain amount of intimacy between himself and Gerald, whose nature, transparent as the day, and utterly incapable of suspicion, was easily drawn into the snare that had been laid for him.

‘Ah, here he is! Well, what news—good or bad? But we need not ask, for there is *success* written in his face—is there not, Miss Brudenell?’

These were the words which, from Lord Arthur’s lips, greeted Gerald on his entrance. The subject in question was an opera-box for that especial evening, and Vinca, who had set her heart on Gerald’s being able to procure it, listened eagerly for his reply.

A happy smile lighted up the young fellow’s handsome face as he placed a large envelope in Vinca’s hand.

‘I wouldn’t be beat,’ he said triumphantly; ‘but I half despaired at one time, the fellows told such different stories. I wish, though—’ gazing, with eyes so full of unutterable love at the smiling face beside him, that Lord Arthur, as



he rose to take his leave, felt something akin to hatred in his heart against the successful one—‘I wish I could have told you the result sooner, but I was sent to and from so many pillars and posts, that I began to fear you would be tired of waiting, and would employ some one else to do what appeared at one time to be the impossible. Oh!’ lowering his voice as he sinks down beside her on the comfortless ‘furnished-house’ sofa, ‘you will never know what happiness it is to me to give you pleasure.’

The girl, feeling the breath of his whisper on her cheek, draws herself, almost involuntarily, a finger’s width away from him. The movement is a slight, and scarcely even a perceptible one, but so sensitive is Gerald’s nature that his heart’s-strings quiver beneath the jar, and Vinca, noting the pallor which has suddenly crept over his features, does not need the warning glance thrown at her before his departure, by Lord Arthur, to induce her to remedy, as best she can, the mischief she has done. She is not utterly without feeling, and needlessly to give pain is not in her nature. Her misfortune is that she has fallen under the spell of an unprincipled man, and that spell she has neither the courage, nor, it is to be feared, the wish to break.

‘How good of you to take so much trouble to

gratify my whims!’ she said, and the look and the smile which accompanied the words were of so healing a nature that Gerald took heart of grace again, and, having with much satisfaction shaken hands with his departing friend, he, whilst his fingers toyed idly with the fringe of her dress, continued in the musical tones which are one of the peculiar attributes of the race from whence he sprang :

‘ You must not call me “good.” It was of myself I thought, and of the great happiness of being near you to-night. It will be as much like Paradise as anything which I am capable of imagining. Heavenly music! Brilliant light! Exquisite and matchless beauty! What can a thrice-blessed human creature wish for more?’

A smile (one which he half fears is indicative of ridicule) on the rosy lips which are so near to his, brings the *tête-montée* lover to his senses, and, whilst he is bitterly reproaching himself, in that his passionate enthusiasm has led him beyond the safe boundary of discretion, Vinca, who finds some difficulty in keeping her thoughts from straying to the man whose companionship she infinitely prefers to that of the lover who has taken his place beside her, seizes the opportunity of saying, laughingly, that she fears his notions of Paradise are not strictly orthodox.

‘For you know, Mr. Mainwaring,’ she says, ‘that the music will be profane, the light nothing more holy than *gas*, and that the lovely creatures you will see at the Opera to-night, are—— Well, not exactly’—drawing out the word in a pretty playful fashion, which enhanced the beauty of her crimson lips—‘what can be called angels.’

‘Not *all*, certainly. “Faultless monsters” are not likely to find their way into a theatre; besides’—hesitating for a moment, for his heart is bounding wildly within his bosom, and he *hears* that his voice is growing harsh and indistinct—‘besides, *my* paradise will be enclosed within a very narrow compass, and *one* angel—if—if—but I cannot expect such happiness—the happiness, I mean, of having for a few hours, at least, that one angel as my sole companion! There will be men coming to the box—men who will think they have a right to——’

‘Be courteous and polite. Well, I think so too,’ interrupted Vinca, who had her own reasons for wishing to postpone for a few hours, at least, a declaration which would bind her irrevocably to Gerald Mainwaring. ‘I like a variety. “Men may come, and men may go”’ (and she warbled the words so prettily that her auditor could, then and there, have fallen down and worshipped her); ‘and you are not to imagine, sir,’ holding up a

warning finger, 'that you are to have everything your own way.'

Poor Gerald! It would have been better for him, could he then and there have had an inkling of the truth—the truth, namely, that Vinca Brudenell, although his junior by three years, was wont, both by reason of her greater experience, and from the mere fact that she belonged to the 'shallow, changing' sex, to look upon him more in the light of a handsome and charming boy than in that of a suitor whose opinion was of importance to her future. The knowledge would have brought with it a bitter, yet a wholesome pang, and might even have taught him a surer way to win this young girl's heart than any he had yet adopted. Not being precisely cold of nature, she was somewhat touched by his devotion to herself; nevertheless, whilst appreciating his good and lovable qualities, she did but scant justice to his mental gifts. The very transparency of his character, and the absence in it of all suspicion, either of evil, or of coming peril, did him disservice in her sight. She saw in this peculiarity, not a proof of his own frank and chivalrous disposition, but an absence of perspicacity which, when evidences thereof became apparent, well-nigh rendered him despicable in her sight. Nothing could, in this young woman's

eyes, have been in reality less desirable, than that Gerald should have become jealous of Lord Arthur Clayton, and yet—such ‘contradictions still’ are women—she not unfrequently found herself on the point of scorning her lover in that he failed to perceive what was passing daily before his sight.

Almost the next sentence he uttered was a proof of what Vinca had grown to consider his obtuseness.

‘I shouldn’t mind so much,’ he said, a little irrelevantly, ‘if I could be sure that only Lord Arthur would be there. He is such a good fellow! And I think he knows—indeed, I am sure he does—that—that——’ but here, for all that he had, over and over again, in the depths of his wildly beating heart, said to the waves of passion, ‘thou shalt go no further,’ they burst through the barrier of restraint, and the cry broke forth aloud, ‘Vinca, my queen — my darling! I love you—I worship you—I would die for you!’

The fire that glowed in his usually soft and dreamy eyes, together with the almost convulsive pressure of her fingers by his fevered lips, startled, and well-nigh alarmed the girl, to whom such ebullitions of southern passion had, as yet, only in sensational novels, been rendered familiar.

There were no witnesses to the 'love scene,' for Mrs. Brudenell, anticipating a *dénouement*, had slipped noiselessly, through the door of the back drawing-room, from the stage on which the most important act in her young daughter's life was, she hoped, about to be played. The astute lady was, in truth, not a little afraid that Lord Arthur's influence over Vinca might, if Gerald's hoped-for proposals were much longer delayed, prove more powerful than her own often administered worldly counsels; and she therefore deemed it advisable to afford the eligible *prétendant* this opportunity of pleading his cause.

And Vinca, how does she—now that the expected crisis has arrived—comport herself? Does she pause before speaking the word which will give her to the arms of one man while her heart is beating for another, or does she, in sheer desperation, cut the Gordian knot at once, and so put an end to hopes, fears, and general uncertainties? Gerald's lips are still upon the hand he grasps, and a still wilder gleam is flashing from his eyes. The situation is growing too serious to be prolonged, and Vinca, with a sudden resumption of something approaching to self-command, changes it.

'You foolish fellow!' she says, and the effort to speak calmly is nearly as futile as are her

attempts to regain possession of her imprisoned fingers. 'What are you thinking of? Why, you can know nothing of me, and to talk of loving me in that crazy fashion is simply absurd.'

For a moment or two Gerald is utterly confounded and broken down. She is laughing at him, he thinks, and must mean him to understand that she cannot love him ; but, young and inexperienced though he is, the owner of Wroxbourne is not deficient in powers of penetration. During the few weeks, moreover, which he has passed in London society, he has learned something of his own value. He has kept, both eyes and ears, open, and has not now to be taught the—to his thinking—thrice-blessed truth, that there are few penniless girls, however beautiful and angelic they may be, who are capable, unless their affections should chance to be given elsewhere, of refusing the wealth which he—in this respect, the most unfortunate of men—has it in his power to offer to the girl he loves. With the speed of lightning these thoughts flash through his brain, whilst with them comes, not only the joy-inspiring memory that Vinca has not, after all, said him 'Nay,' but the almost equally cheering reflection that she is, to the best of his belief, not only heart-whole, but *portionless*. With such encouragements to 'hope

on ' as these, it is scarcely surprising that a suiter so much in earnest as was Gerald Mainwaring should have still held within his own the hand which he had captured.

It has taken time to chronicle the several causes by which this ardent lover has been induced not to abandon hope ; but in reality not ten seconds have elapsed since Vinca had uttered her, in reality, far from discouraging rejoinder. In truth, she did not intend that the said rejoinder should bear, in the very slightest degree, the character of a refusal. Were Gerald to take her at her word, and withdraw his pretensions to her hand until time and more intimate association should have made him better acquainted with the condition of her heart and the qualities of her mind, it was just possible that she might lose him altogether. The bare notion of such a catastrophe stirred her to immediate action. Gerald must, she felt, at once be reassured, and the chains of her captive riveted. Before, therefore, he had recovered himself sufficiently to reply, words full of encouragement fell from her lips, and the enraptured lover, on whose heart the soothing sentences fell 'like whispered balm,' was permitted to clasp to his breast the woman who, moved by no love for him, but shrinking from the evils of poverty, had promised to link her life with his.





## CHAPTER XXII.

‘Weave the warp, and weave the woof.’

GRAY.

‘No language but a cry.’

TENNYSON.

It had not been Vinca's lot to be endowed either with very strong or with very deep feelings, but she was not altogether wanting in sympathy; and worldly prudence—in the absence of any considerable amount of fixed principles of action—counselling her to see as well as to think as little as possible of Lord Arthur Clayton, it followed that ere long she began to put a higher value, not only on the love which she had gained, but on the character of the man whose wife she had promised to be. A feeling of gratitude also sprang up and gradually strengthened in her heart towards him, for was it not through his intervention that she would be rescued from the, to her, horrible evils which a life of struggle with

poverty entails? She had seen—poor girl!—so much of it. From lodging-house to lodging-house she had, both before and since her father's death, been taken, and her soul sickened at the memory of ill-cooked food, and 'general servants' whose hands and aprons, to say nothing of their faces, bore ample testimony to the miscellaneous nature of their daily duties. And then the bills! The constant, weariful talk about money, and how to induce the two ends, which were always so far apart, to meet, had been so odious, so embittering of every pleasure, that when she told herself that for her the struggle, the deprivation and the *encanaillement* which a state of impecuniosity entails, were over, she could not but feel drawn to the man through whose instrumentality this miracle had been brought about.

The only one of Gerald's people who heard the news of his engagement with satisfaction was Aunt Madge. She had always, as we know, been an advocate for his early marriage, and she had seen enough of Vinca Brudenell to feel tolerably certain that his chosen bride would in some respects exert an influence over him for good. It is more than probable that the young lady had taken care, while at Herondale, to show only the best side of her character to clever, outspoken Margaret Fielden; and it is equally a fact that

the latter, in her wish to think well of the beautiful girl with whom her 'boy' fell in love at first sight, had formed a better opinion of Vinca Brudenell than that young person deserved.

The indignation of Lady Arabella, when she received a letter from her grandson announcing his approaching marriage, knew no bounds; and finding it impossible to remain quietly at the Abbey, where there was not a single creature near to whom she could appeal for sympathy with her feelings, she forthwith ordered her carriage, and set off on a solitary drive to Herondale. She was received, as she had expected, by Miss Fielden, the heads of the house being absent in London. The two ladies had not met since the passage of arms at Wroxbourne, on which occasion Aunt Madge had shown herself very decidedly in favour of Gerald's at that time very slight acquaintance with the fair sex being improved by the enlivening society of the Brudenell family. With the arguments then used by her adversary fresh in her recollection, Lady Arabella, nothing doubting that Aunt Madge's opinions regarding the result of the said 'improvement' coincided with her own, came charged with a whole battery of triumph, the firing off of which she looked forward to as some slight consolation under this heavy trial.

‘Well, now, I hope you are satisfied!’ was the first sentence which the irate old lady found breath to utter; for she was, in truth, so oppressed with the weight of angry words *quoad* Gerald’s backsliding which had accumulated in her breast, that to retain them longer became to her an impossible task.

Miss Fielden, who made her appearance in a well-worn brown hat and very workmanlike garden-gloves, looked handsome and cheerful as was her wont. Whilst shaking hands with her visitor, and listening to her opening remarks, there was no shadow on the bright brunette face; and as the ill-assorted pair took their seats, there was *that* in Aunt Madge’s aspect and manner which caused Lady Arabella to dimly suspect that she would not find in ‘that interfering old maid’ (as she had been heard to call her old acquaintance) a very warm sympathizer with her affliction.

‘I knew from the first how it would be; indeed, I as much as said so,’ continued the angry grandame. ‘But you would not listen to me, and now you see what has come of it.’

‘Well, nothing very bad as yet, I hope,’ rejoined Aunt Madge, smiling. ‘But even if this marriage should turn out ill for Gerald, which I trust in Heaven may not be the case, I cannot accuse myself with having been instrumental in

bringing it about. The Brudenells' visit took us all equally by surprise; and as to the foolish boy falling in love at first sight, I do not see how either I, or anyone else could have prevented it.'

'But you encouraged him in his folly. You thought it well that he and that odious girl should meet——'

'My dear Lady Arabella—pardon me, though, for interrupting you—Vinca is really not an odious girl. She is young and thoughtless, but she has plenty of sense; and, all things considered, I am inclined to hope that there is nothing very fatal in what has happened.'

'Nothing fatal!' almost screamed her ladyship. 'Do you call it nothing fatal, his marrying a fast, flirting creature, with no connexions to speak of? And his being hindered from choosing anyone whom it would be good for him to marry—is *that* not a fatal thing?'

'Let us hope that the marriage may prove more to the dear boy's advantage than you at present think possible. I quite acknowledge,' continued Margaret frankly, 'that for Gerald individually I think an early marriage is desirable. His position is a peculiar one——'

'Not at all. I don't know what you mean by peculiar.'

Aunt Madge shrugged her shoulders despair-

ingly. If Lady Arabella would not admit the fact that the circumstances attending her grandson's birth were anomalous and singular—if she refused to realize the truth that a veil of mystery shrouded his antecedents, and that in the mere circumstance of his own ignorance of his true parentage there existed an element of danger—why, then, one of Miss Fielden's chief arguments in favour of his marriage with a girl situated as was Vinca Brudenell would, with the self-opinated old lady, have little or no weight, and any discussion on the subject must necessarily prove useless.

‘How I wish,’ she is saying to herself, ‘that the poor old thing could be visited by a gleam of common sense!’ when Lady Arabella's authoritative voice breaks the momentary silence :

‘I see no reason whatever,’ she says, ‘why Gerald's position, as you call it, should stand in his way. It need never transpire that he is not your sister's son. After all the pains that were taken by his father to legitimize his birth—when his parents were acclimatized—I mean—what is the word ?’

‘Naturalized,’ suggested Aunt Madge, generously suppressing a smile. ‘Yes, my poor dear sister agreed to all her husband's wishes, and I have always admired and appreciated the good-

ness of *his* heart, in that he so earnestly desired to make what amends he could for the wrong that he had done. But, Lady Arabella, now we have entered upon this painful subject, you must allow me to say that I do not share your opinion as to the certainty of poor Gerald's secret being always kept, either from him or from the world; and if—if it had so chanced that his affections had been given to some girl of high rank, whose relations would, probably (were the truth to become known), bitterly resent the imposture which had been practised on them, only think, dear Lady Arabella, what misery to our boy would follow! People who think themselves "great" are not always "merciful;" and good and charming as Gerald is——'

'And rich! You seem to forget that the discovery which you have chosen to foretell would not make him other than the possessor of Wroxbourne, and that, in these days especially, wealth does not go for nothing in the estimation of Society.'

'Granted; but for all that—— Well'—suddenly recollecting the futility of discussing this, or indeed any other point, with her stiff-necked and perverse opponent—'we need not, as you say, forestall evils. To make the best of the present is all we have to do, and I trust that in

time you will take a more favourable view than you can be expected to do at present of our dear Gerald's prospects. If Vinca Brudenell makes him a good and loving wife, I, at least, shall be contented.'

The marriage, at which Lady Arabella refused to 'assist,' took place during the first week in August, and the newly-married pair followed the time-honoured custom of betaking themselves, in the first instance, to the Continent. Mrs. Gerald, who found foreign travelling—as the bride of a wealthy Englishman whose chief pleasure it was to gratify her every whim—infinately to her taste, was in no hurry to commence the home-life, which for her was as yet a thing untried; but the period was approaching when the life of constant change, excitement, and pleasure must perforce have an end, for Vinca's expected confinement was to take place in the July following on the midsummer marriage, and for that cause it became necessary that the young couple should hasten Londonwards. During the months that for them had glided by so quickly, the harmony which existed between them had never been for an hour disturbed. Vinca ('small blame to her') had shown herself habitually at her best; and Gerald, whilst looking forward,



not only to the immediate, but to the more distant future, regarded himself, and that with apparent reason, as a singularly fortunate individual.

In due time the expected hour arrived. All went well and smoothly with the patient, and the child, which was a girl, was christened Claudia—a singular coincidence, although of its being such only the Fieldens and Lady Arabella were, as I need hardly say, at the period of the baptism cognisant.

‘I don’t seem to care very much for the name, darling. Do you?’ Gerald in mild dissent had said; but Vinca had put a stop to this faint opposition by saying that, it being her mother’s, and Mrs. Brudenell having promised to be one of the godmothers, they could not well refuse to give their child her Christian name.

‘I think it a pretty one besides,’ Vinca added; ‘and we can give her another also, so that she can choose between the two when she grows up. What do you say to Geraldine—Claudia Geraldine?’ And Vinca, who was looking very interesting as she lay in convalescent costume upon her sofa, scribbled the two names in pencil on her note-book, and presented the page to her husband for his approval. ‘There! Does it not look romantic? The very names for the heroine of a sensational novel!’

‘Romantic—yes,’ Gerald rejoins, whilst a smile lights up the handsome face, which during the past year had assumed a far more manly aspect than it could, at the time of his marriage, have boasted of possessing. ‘All the same,’ looking with fond admiration at the beautiful features of his wife, ‘I should like better to call the little one Vinca. No other name—not even that of Lilian, my own mother’s—will ever sound so sweet to me as yours.’

‘And suppose, you foolish boy,’ said Vinca, laughing, ‘that the little imp should be so *contrairy*, as Nurse Handley says, as to have dark eyes like yours, how inappropriate the name would be! And I believe that baby’s eyes *will* be brown, though mamma declares that they are blue. She is a darling, any way; and Gerald, dear, will you ring the bell, and if the pet happens to be awake, nurse shall bring her in, and we will have a minute inspection of her features. Of course, *I* would rather arrive at the conclusion that her eyes resemble *yours*.’

The scrutiny, which without delay followed on this resolve, did not prove altogether satisfactory. This was the first day of the young mother’s removal from her bed-chamber to the pretty dressing-room adjoining. The former had been kept, according to custom in such cases, *en*

*demijour*, and consequently Vinca had not as yet enjoyed the opportunity of contemplating, by the full light of day, the charms of her first-born.

‘The pretty dear has just roused up, and had her little drops,’ said the portly monthly nurse, as she slowly approached the sofa with her charge, and with cautious hand removed the diaphanous cambric handkerchief which, to guard against a possible draught of air, had been placed lightly over the infant’s face.

For a few moments Vinca, who had raised herself on her elbow, contemplated the small, meaningless features of her offspring in silence; then, looking up a little anxiously into Mrs. Handley’s stolid face, she said:

‘Is not its skin *rather* sallow than most babies’ are, nurse? And I can’t make out its eyes.’

‘No more you never can, ’m. Infants’ eyes is so deceptive, and as to being saller—why, lorst, ’m, babies’ skins change while you’re a looking at ’em.’

‘Well, that is a comfort, at any rate,’ said Vinca languidly; ‘and as it looks just now like crying, you had better take it away. I suppose the poor little atom will be prettier by-and-by,’ she added, as the closed door deadened the sound of a commencing wail; and then, being slightly tired with her exertions, Mrs. Mainwaring sank into a refreshing slumber.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

‘Everyone is as God made him, and oftentimes a great deal worse.’

CERVANTES.

VINCA had not—as well we know—married Gerald Mainwaring ‘for love;’ but his unvarying kindness and devotion, together with much that was admirable in his character and disposition, had won their way to her heart, and during the twelve months which had sped by so quickly, the husband had without doubt become dearer than had been the bridegroom.

Both in tastes and in temperaments there could, however, between the pair, be traced very little power of assimilation. Vinca cared nothing for improving reading, or for any conversation which had in it a tinge either of seriousness, or *solidity*. She delighted in change, excitement, and society, and had proved, whilst these stimulants were within her reach, a sufficiently lively

companion ; under what aspect she would appear when the 'settling down' into the quiet routine of everyday life had actually begun, remained, however, as yet, a problem to be solved.

It was fortunate for this somewhat giddy, although not ill-intentioned, young woman, that, in the course of their travels, they had not once chanced to 'fall in' with Lord Arthur Clayton. On more than one occasion it had been only by a *fluke* that the Mainwarings had missed finding themselves in the same hotel as the *enfant chéri des dames*, whose name Vinca could not, alas! hear without a slight quickening of her pulses ; for her love for him had not only been very true and real, but she had given him credit for feelings which were deep and impassioned as her own. She was consoled, in the midst of her regret at 'missing' her former admirer, by the surmise that he—for prudential reasons, and because of his own self-mistrust—had purposely avoided what might have proved a dangerous meeting. Facts, however, did not justify her in this belief. Lord Arthur's movements were not in the slightest degree affected by those of his former friends. More than once had he, since that little *episode* of his with Vinca Brudenell, found in 'woman's looks' very interesting, if not very edifying, reading. His admira-

tion for Mrs. Brudenell's beautiful daughter had been—*while it lasted*—as real, as had been, in his own opinion, his love ; but so true is it *qu'on n'a jamais aimé ceux qu'on n'aime plus*, that it is more than probable that his lordship's passion for Vinca had not greatly exceeded in warmth a dozen which had preceded, and nearly as many as had followed after it.

Gerald's adoration of his wife had—since his marriage—known neither diminution nor change. As he loved her when, with her small hand in his, she plighted to him her troth, so did he worship her when, after more than a year of married life, he took her to his grand Marlshire home.

'I hope you will be happy here, my own,' he says to her, as, in the pretty open carriage which had been sent to meet them at the station, they drive slowly up the rather steep ascent which leads, through a magnificent avenue of limes, to the Abbey. 'We shall not, I fear, have as much society as you have been accustomed to. As you may remember, the neighbours are few round Herondale, and Wroxbourne is still more out of the world.'

'Oh, that is nothing,' rejoins Vinca airily. 'Country neighbours are always bores, and in a large house, full of pleasant people, one can always have as much fun as one wants.'

‘To say nothing of little Claudy,’ suggested Gerald with a smile, which had, however, more of sadness in it than of mirth, for he had already suffered from more than one foreboding of what the future had in store for him. He was beginning to fear that in more respects than he liked to think of, his wife and he were unfitted to each other. His nature was not only, as I have said, an indolent, but a quiet and a home-loving one. He was a reader also; and the society of one pleasant and congenial friend gave him infinitely more satisfaction than he ever derived from the crowded assemblies and gay dinner-parties in which Vinca’s soul delighted.

As they drew near to the stately pile on the massive walls of which centuries past and gone had set their ‘signet,’ Gerald Mainwaring asked himself the inauspicious question, ‘How will she amuse herself at Wroxbourne?’ Even to his own thinking, the Abbey had, strange to say, assumed an aspect singularly sombre and forbidding. He had never loved the place, which, indeed, was not associated in his mind with any of the sports and pleasures of boyhood; for, as I have already said, D’Arcy Mainwaring spent far more of his time in seclusion on the Continent, than in the almost ‘palace-home’ in England which had descended to him from his forefathers;

and the mere fact that it was now his own did not in Gerald's breast awaken any agreeable or exultant feelings.

Amongst his earliest recollections was that of a cottage built of wood, *chalet* fashion, with projecting upper story, and huge stones resting on the sloping roof, the purpose of the said stones being—as the child was told—to keep the tiles from being blown away by the gales which swept wildly round the mountains. Round and about in every direction there were cherry orchards, and in the month of May—most delicious of all seasons in the Swiss mountains—the air was perfumed with the scent of snow-white *kirschen* blossoms. Then came—a time of infinite delight to Gerald—the gathering of the small black fruit, and the merry-making and rustic dances which were concomitants of the all-important harvest. Buried in the solitude of the mountains, and far removed from rush of railway-trains and from the din of cities, was the small straggling village in which, until he was old enough for his *apparent* age to excite neither surmise nor question regarding his identity as Lilian's child, Gerald Mainwaring lived and flourished. He had reached the age of seven before it was deemed prudent, by the man whose desire to make 'amends' to Claudine and her boy had become the ruling



passion of his life, to take the child to England; but, as has been previously narrated, various causes combined to render any lengthened stay in Marlshire—in Mr. Mainwaring's opinion at least—unadvisable.

Lady Arabella had, shortly after receiving the intelligence of her grandson's engagement to Vinca Brudenell, removed herself and her belongings from the Abbey. She had, as I have said, refused to be present at the wedding, and had lost no opportunity of manifesting her extreme, and, in point of fact, not wholly unwarrantable, displeasure at the 'successful scheming'—as she chose to phrase it—of the 'Brudenell set.' But, although his emancipation from his grandmother's rule was certainly a state of things to rejoice over, yet, so affectionate and oblivious of wrong was the disposition of this young man, that he, being likewise conservative in his tastes, and endowed with a tenacious memory, felt something akin to sadness whilst he noted the added stillness which, in the old house, the abdication of Lady Arabella had caused. In her 'way,' he remembered, she had been good to him, and then, what a vast amount of care and of 'trouble' (as he now, for the first time, reflected) had not her residence at Wroxbourne saved him from enduring! Never until now had he realized the

debt of gratitude which he owed to the clear-headed, business-loving despot, against whose authority he had so often, inwardly at least, if not outwardly, rebelled ; and now his fixed though unspoken conviction that the wife whom he had chosen was one of the last women in the world capable of, in the very slightest degree, supplying as a 'help-mate' Lady Arabella's place, did not tend towards rendering the prospect which Gerald's imagination had conjured up more bright and encouraging.

It had proved a real misfortune to Claudine Montez's son that the circumstances of his life had not been such as to compel him to exert himself. He was far from deficient either in strength of mind or in natural ability, but his extreme, and, in point of fact, constitutional disinclination to exertion had been unwittingly fostered by the overweening affection and indulgence of those about him, and by the absence of any stimulus to overcome the inertness, both mental and physical, which was part and parcel of his being. Like some beautiful bird of the Tropics, whose only apparent vocation is to smooth its brilliant plumage in the sun's rays, so had Gerald Mainwaring hitherto idled away his life, the 'shining hours' of which had been given him to improve.

But many things in that life of indolence and supineness must, as he rightly surmises, be altered now. The duties which are incumbent on the owner of a large estate, and the head of an extensive establishment, must be fulfilled by the man who is responsible for their well ordering, instead of by the elderly lady whose activity of mind, even more than her love of power and rule, had induced her to so greatly prolong the period of her regency. Happily Gerald was not one likely to, in the slightest degree, prove an example of the truthful distich, that—

‘Small habits well-pursued betimes  
May reach the dignity of crimes.’

His sense of duty was strong, and, on the score of responsibility, he was almost morbidly sensitive; those who cared for his well-doing had, therefore, in reality, no cause to fear that in his hands riches would be misapplied, or power abused. That his wife would, as time wore on, prove more of a hindrance than a help to him, was, however, a prediction which those who knew the young chatelaine of Wroxbourne best, were the first to give voice to. Equally prevalent, moreover, was—amongst cursory observers—the belief that even if Mr. Mainwaring *should* disap-

prove of the fair Vinca's arrangements and proceedings, he would never exert himself to the extent of endeavouring to put a stop to them. 'Gerald is one of the best and most conscientious fellows "going,"' was the *dictum* of those who imagined themselves to be authorities on the subject; 'but with him, a quiet life is the main desideratum, and to save himself trouble, and to ensure domestic peace, there is nothing that he would not find it easy to shut his eyes to.'





## CHAPTER XXIV.

‘She that weds well, will wisely match her love  
Nor be below her husband, nor above.’

OVID.

IT is Christmas time at Wroxbourne, and the guest-chambers are full to overflowing. There is no stillness in the old place now, but instead, the voices of many tongues, the ring of laughter, and the echoes through the vaulted passages of harmonious music make strange contrast with the decorous silence which during the old régime had prevailed within the Abbey walls. The tastes of the Brudenell family, who, with the exception of Mary, were all assembled at Wroxbourne, were decidedly in favour of movement and variety. It was essential, too, that Mabel—who was, unfortunately, not like Vinca, an indisputable ‘beauty’—should be married; and in order to effect this desirable end, young Mrs. Mainwaring had invited more than one eligible

*parti* to spend the season of Christmas at the Abbey.

‘There are several who would do,’ Vinca had, soon after her mother’s arrival on a lengthened visit, said in the privacy of that lady’s dressing-room to her anxiously listening parent. ‘Sir Everard Coleman, who is supposed to have what are called æsthetic tastes, and to appreciate girls who have had a solid education and understand Latin, *might* be led into proposing ; but then, like all men, he has a weakness for good looks, and Mabel is so very plain.’

‘Indeed she is. It is most unfortunate. She takes after your father’s family—your Aunt Jane has just the same heavy nose and coarse shiny complexion.’

‘And it was through being with her no doubt that Miss Mabel has learned to consider herself clever, and all that kind of thing ; for my part, however, I do not believe that she really possesses any of the tastes and talents which so many give her credit for. She can use her eyes though, and as they are tolerably good, let us hope that she will succeed in inducing either Sir Everard or Lord Strathcarron, who is the very ugliest, shiest little man that ever lived, to marry her.’

‘Oh, the last is too good to hope for,’ ex-

claimed Mrs. Brudenell. 'I should be quite satisfied with a smaller match for Mabel.'

'You cannot expect anything much more microscopic than poor Strath,' laughed Vinca. 'I don't know, though, why I should call him "poor," for he is perfectly happy with his learning and his languages; and has never, I believe, been guilty of saying, excepting from sheer necessity, a dozen consecutive words to any woman in his life.'

'From which we may conclude that unless he is weak enough to succumb to the kind of flattery which Mabel contrives to throw at men through those brown eyes of hers, she has not much chance of becoming a viscountess. One thing, dear, I own I *am* sorry for, and that is your having asked Dora Majendie here just now. She has all your Aunt Jane's talent for making men think her agreeable, and none of her goody-goodyness. She is not at all the person to help Mabel in a difficulty.'

'Well, now, do you know, I think she is,' mused Vinca, as, carefully screening her fair complexion from the heat of a large coal fire, she rested her dainty feet upon the fender. 'She is really very fond of Mabel, and to be *that* she must, to a certain extent, believe in her. She showed all those carefully studied letters which

Mabel wrote to her from the lakes to David Scott, without, I feel *almost* sure, a suspicion that they were concocted for the very purpose to which they were put. Such description of scenery! such adoration for art, as she had jumbled up together! I wonder what Dora has done with them? I shall ask her some day, and laugh at Davy for having been so taken in. She really wanted him to marry Mabel, but he was too wary to be caught.'

'And who have you besides in the shape of men? No one, I hope, that Mabel can flirt, or fancy herself in love, with.'

'Well, I think not; but one cannot tell, for her powers in that way are considerable for her time of life. She may—though I hardly think it possible—make play with those caressing eyes of hers at Mr. John W. Scobell—our American friend of long ago, of whom I wrote to you, and——'

'Do you know, Vinca,' put in her mother, in a tone of very serious remonstrance, 'I think you have made a great mistake in inviting Mr. Scobell. Having made his acquaintance at that horrid Glenwyllt boarding-house, to which we should never have gone——'

'If we could have helped it—I know that,' laughed Vinca, who had not only a sufficient



amount of good sense, but who was now, in her own opinion, too important a personage to be ashamed of the impecuniosity which had, in former days, wrought her so much discomfort. 'It was an odious time—was it not? And Mr. Scobell, I remember, was the only person who made it bearable. Nevertheless, I should not have asked him, because of you and Mabel, but Gerald and the Yankee (as we used to call him) took such a fancy to one another when Mr. Scobell claimed acquaintance with me at Paris, that an engagement was made then and there that this visit should take place at Christmas.'

'A long invitation, certainly, and I still wish that something had occurred to prevent the man accepting it.'

'*Wull*—as his countrywomen say—it's rather odd that something didn't, for he has been half over the world since then. Far into the interior of Africa—holding, as Gerald says, his life in his hand, and not seeming to care whether he kept or lost it! Now, if Mabel were at all like me, she would fall in love with Mr. Scobell on the spot. I do so delight in an utterly fearless man! That kind of reckless courage is the one only thing which sets them above women, and when our American can be got to talk about himself, I feel his superiority, and I rather like it.'

‘Never once suspecting, I dare say,’ rejoined Mrs. Brudenell crossly, ‘that there is probably hardly a word of truth in what he tells you. The Yankees are wonderful hands at invention and exaggeration, and I am surprised at your husband being taken in by this Mr. Scobell’s travellers’ tales. If I remember right,’ she continued after a pause, during which Vinca did not—as the speaker had expected would be the case—take up the cudgels for her absent friend, ‘he is not at all good-looking.’

‘Far from it. A plain, dark-complexioned man, with a bony face, and with what the Americans call a *goatee* beard. His eyes, though, are wonderful—so black and piercing that I can quite understand his looking a lion out of countenance. You should see little Cissy Langham’s face when she is listening to Mr. Scobell; it is so full of awe and admiration that I can hardly take my eyes off it. She and Rosie are to ‘mess’ together. *They* will be much jollier so than sitting out a long dinner with us. There is only a month between their ages, and both are so pretty in their different ways! I really think that Rosie improves in looks every time I see her.’

‘I wish we could say the same for Mabel,’ responded Mrs. Brudenell gloomily, as Vinca,

on hearing the dressing-gong sound, gave her mother a careless kiss, and hurried away to her own apartments.

It was a beautiful room, that into which Mrs. Brudenell and her daughter were ushered, a few minutes before eight o'clock, by the attentive groom of the chambers. Those who had known that now bright and tastefully-furnished apartment in the days when Lady Arabella, in her handsome silk dress and old-world lace, presided in it as mistress, would hardly, in its altered condition, have recognised it now. It was well but not brilliantly lighted; indeed, in the neighbourhood of the large fireplace on which the big yule logs blazed and crackled, the said fire played an important part in the somewhat partial illumination of the room.

'I hope you like this sort of gloaming light,' said Vinca, as in her rich evening dress of sapphire-coloured velvet she made her appearance amongst her guests, about half of whose collected number she was addressing. '*I think it so pleasant!* Mamma'—touching Mrs. Brudenell's arm, 'let me introduce you to Lady Flora Carmichael. Ah, here is the General! I hope he did not catch cold. I found it bitter in the open carriage, and have hardly'—with a shiver of her alabaster shoulders—'shaken off the chill yet.'

‘Chills are very dangerous things,’ began General Carmichael, who, at the age of eighty, piqued himself on the strength of his constitution, and gave, by his obstinate refusal to ‘take care of himself,’ a great deal of domestic trouble and inconvenience. ‘I can’t say that I ever suffered from one myself, but my friend Joselyn—the Admiral, you know, who is ten years junior to me—has to be *very* careful. No open windows in winter time for him, poor fellow! Flannel next his skin, and all that kind of thing, you know. Now I——’

‘Dear Mrs. Mercer! How good of you to drive five miles to dinner in such weather as this!’ said Vinca, hastening to greet some newly arrived guests who were of sufficiently small account to feel elated by occasional invitations to the Abbey. ‘*Do* come near the fire, and let me introduce you to General Carmichael,’ she added remorselessly, satisfied to make over the ‘bore’ of the party to one who would be amply compensated for the infliction by the belief that she was extending her acquaintance amongst the ‘staying’ guests at Wroxbourne. ‘Captain Mercer and the General can talk to one another about India’—and then, with one of her pretty caressing smiles, she left the two perfectly unsuited men to follow up, as best they could,

the acquaintance thus inauspiciously commenced.

The dinner passed off pleasantly enough. The guests, with the exception of Lord Strathcarron, were talkative and cheerful, so that the buzz of human voices went on uninterruptedly, and a *quantum sufficit* of well-regulated laughter bore testimony to the fact that the company assembled were having what Mr. Scobell's country-women would have called a 'good time.' Mabel's neighbours on either hand were General Carmichael and Mr. Willoughby, the young man who has been already mentioned as a 'reading' pupil of Dr. Langham's. Being essentially, and in all respects, 'backward,' Miss Brudenell's flattering glances were bestowed upon him in vain; whilst, as regarded General Carmichael, that veteran soldier was far too seriously engrossed—first with the proper comprehension of the *ménu*, and then with the due carrying out of the intentions which, during the perusal of that all-important document, he had formed, for even the 'fairest she' that ever smiled on man to have for him even the faintest attractive power. The young lady, therefore, in whose breast *le cri de la nature* (as Balzac has called the '*épousez moi!*' of marriageable maidens) was echoing silently, had been without doubt injudiciously

placed. Her keen sense of this mistake was whisperingly expressed by the young lady to her sister, as the two proceeded, in the wake of the invited ladies, to the drawing-room.

‘You were, of course, obliged,’ she said, ‘to have Sir Everard and Lord Strathcorran next to you. But why not give me Mr. Scobell? I knew him as well as you did at that dreadful Balmoral House; and though he used to be awfully dull there, he would have been better than the men I had. One too old, and the other a perfect boy—and both so stupid!’

‘Well, you must do better for yourself when the gentlemen come from the dining-room,’ responded Vinca hurriedly, for she had her duties as hostess to perform, and had neither time nor inclination to listen to Miss Mabel’s reproaches. She found, however, a moment in which to add : ‘I hope you will look after Rosie a little, and try to keep her quiet. If she will stay with Cissy Langham it will be all right, but *she* is such a shy creature, and so young for her age, that Rosie, I am afraid, won’t find any fun in talking to her. However, you must see, for all our sakes, what you can do.’

To this appeal Mabel made no rejoinder. Probably she knew by experience that any attempts at ‘looking after’ Miss Rosie were seldom followed by satisfactory results.



## CHAPTER XXV.

‘A plague of Opinion. A man may wear it on both sides like a leathern jerkin.’

SHAKESPEARE.

WITH every good will to follow her sister's advice, and ‘do better’ for her future prospects, Mabel found herself for a short while after the entrance of the gentlemen unable to in any way advance her own interests. As is the wont of Englishmen, those who had—in conventional phrase—‘joined the ladies,’ held themselves aloof from the waiting fair ones, pursuing with apparent eagerness, in groups of twos and threes, the arguments which had been commenced over the dessert.

Mr. Scobell, who was a Virginian by birth, and a gentleman in the true sense of the word, was the first to break through a custom which greatly militated against his ideas of what—in the matter of respectful observance—is due to

the weaker sex. His first move—a seat being vacant near her chair—was towards Mabel, and Vinca, who, although apparently deep in conversation with Lady Flora Carmichael, was watching his proceedings narrowly, noted with dismay that not Rosie alone, but several others of the assembled guests were within earshot of the unavoidable forthcoming dialogue between the American and his boarding-house acquaintance. Still worse than her anticipations proved the terrible reality, for no sooner did Rosie's big brown eyes rest on her former friend, than, with her usual impulsiveness, she sprang forward to greet him.

‘I felt so glad when I was told you were coming to-day,’ she said eagerly, as she returned the cordial Transatlantic hand-shake by one as frank and as energetic as his own. ‘If I had known exactly when it would be, I should have been in the hall to meet you.’

‘You are very good,’ he rejoined with a smile, and with an expression of tender goodwill in his deep-set eyes which lent an indescribable charm to his homely features. ‘Much *too* good, indeed, for young ladies are not expected to take that kind of trouble, especially for men.’

‘Oh, but I am not a young lady yet, thank goodness! and shan’t be till I come out. Besides, I am not likely to forget all the trouble you took



for me at Glenwyllt. Do you remember the pony falling, and how frightened I was? I should have been dead if you had not helped me.'

'Not at all. There was not the slightest danger. The precipice was fifty yards off at least. The risks which we all ran at Glenwyllt were of another and far worse kind, for, to the best of my recollection, we were very near starvation at that much-vaunted boarding-house. And do you remember Amelia, the waitress?'

'Indeed I do, the dreadful creature, with her horrid thumbs in the soup-plates! and oh—the black-beetles! And Miss Vandeleur, the important young lady who had 'carriage company' calling on her, and who was looked up to with envy and admiration by the rest of the boarders.'

'Even by the half-witted old maid, who repeated her pitiful love-tale to us so often! I have sometimes thought——'

But what Mr. Scobell had 'sometimes thought' was not, at that moment, fated to be known, for Mrs. Mainwaring, making a desperate effort to arrest the flood of mutual reminiscences which she felt certain was in progress, suddenly approached the speakers, and, with a short apology to the American for interrupting the conversation, *desired* her sister to 'play something.'

Now Miss Rosie was very far from being the

sort of young person to take an 'order' from an elder sister quietly. She possessed—as her family in general were well aware—a strong will of her own, and the fact of being 'told,' especially before 'company,' to do that which was disagreeable to herself, would on any other occasion have been sufficient to provoke on her part a refusal to do as she was bid. It was solely owing to the presence and influence of the big American that the young lady, with a flushed cheek and an ominous light in her large eyes, walked away in the direction of the piano. She was a striking-looking girl, tall for her age, and in appearance considerably in advance of her actual years. Between her and Mr. John W. Scobell, there had existed, during their joint sojourn at the Glenwyllt boarding-house, a very considerable amount of intimacy. A man verging upon forty-five, who is universally admitted to be ugly, may be permitted, without danger to her reputation, to be on very friendly terms with a youthful maiden of barely sixteen; in the pretty little Welsh watering-place also, to which Mrs. Brudenell had betaken herself and her belongings, more latitude could in such matters be of course allowed than would have been possible in a place of more fashionable and world-known resort.

The American had been amused with the live

chatter of the *quasi* child, and delighted with the frankness of a character which formed so striking a contrast with that of her mother; whilst the girl had, on her side, imbibed not only a feeling amounting almost to affection, but a certain degree of unconscious reverence for a man who knew so much, and was withal so brave and kind, as her wandering and in some respects un-Yankee-like American acquaintance.

‘You have been in Rome lately, I think, have you not, Mr. Scobell?’ asked Vinca, as she took possession of her sister’s chair. ‘Were there many English there? and did you find it as pleasant as usual?’

‘Quite,’ was the smiling answer. ‘Nothing—not even the cleaning and trimming up by Count R—— of the Coliseum—can un-Rome Rome! It was a barbarous act, though,’ he, as if communing with himself, added.

‘I can quite understand,’ responded Vinca, ‘that it must have been much prettier before, by moonlight especially. And do tell me—for one hears such different accounts—who were the reigning beauties? Your countrywomen of course were amongst them?’

He hesitated for a few moments, searching his memory, as it appeared to Vinca, for a fitting reply, and then he said, with a manner that bordered on reluctance:

‘The handsomest woman in Rome, as most people seemed to agree, was Princess Wolkersdorf. She is not what is called young—over thirty by a year or two, I should say—and has a daughter of seventeen, who is nearly as lovely as herself.’

‘And is she an Italian by birth? Is she a dark or a fair beauty?’

Again the American hesitated, and again it occurred to Vinca that some mystery was, in Mr. Scobell’s thoughts at least, connected with the name of Wolkersdorf.

He passed his hand slowly over his forehead, and then, looking up suddenly from under his overhanging brows, he said thoughtfully :

‘There are various opinions and conjectures as to the parentage of Princess Wolkersdorf. Some, who profess to be very learned in such matters, declare that hers is the Georgian type of beauty ; whilst others—but after all, of what moment is it? The lady is lovely, agreeable, and, above all, rich. Her husband’s family is one of the oldest and most highly considered in Italy, in which country they are naturalized, and her house is the very pleasantest into which I have ever been so fortunate as to gain admission.’

‘And the Prince—you have said nothing about him—is he also agreeable and good-looking? Or

is he one of the many foreign husbands who are so entirely eclipsed by their wives that no one ever dreams of mentioning them, or, indeed, of remembering their existence ?’

Once more there was a pause, and once more the American replied as though unwillingly to the questions of his hostess.

‘The Prince has been very unfortunate,’ he said at length. ‘He was many years his wife’s senior—an old man, in fact, as compared to her—and his character for eccentricity had long been known. He had travelled much in his time, and it was during his travels that—at a distance, as I have understood, from Europe—he met his fate. For several years they lived together—not, I believe, unhappily ; but at length symptoms of mental aberration became apparent in the Prince, and he is now hopelessly insane.’

‘How dreadful !’ exclaimed not only Vinca, but several lady listeners to whom the dialogue appeared to be one of interest. ‘And she can actually go into society and amuse herself whilst her husband is in this most melancholy condition ? How terribly hard of heart your beauty must be !’

‘Pardon me, but I do not think we have quite a right to draw such a conclusion from her conduct. The Principessa has a daughter, we must

remember, whose introduction into what is called *company* is, I suppose, a matter of necessity; and then, from all I have heard, the old man's delusions are very pleasant ones, and he has entirely forgotten his wife. Which of your poets is it who says, "There is a pleasure in being mad, that only madmen know?" We who are sane find it hard to believe in the truth of this dictum; but I—or, I should rather say, those—who have visited Prince Wolkersdorf in the beautiful villa where—in utter ignorance of the fact that he is under lock and key—he passes away his painless life, are of opinion that this especial *pazzo*, believing as he does that he is the reigning sovereign of united Italy, is one of the happiest of human beings. After all, seeing that the chief joys of youth are caused by its capacity for self-delusion, may we not deem that man most blest who carries that power with him to the grave?

'And you say that the daughter, too, is handsome?' said Vinca, after a few moments' silence, during which those present might, had they felt so inclined, have followed the turn in the conversation which Mr. Scobell had adroitly given.

'Hardly that. Princess Dacia is a pretty *mignonne* thing, graceful as a Greek statue, and well dressed as a Parisienne——'

'Or as an American beauty,' put in Gerald

Mainwaring, who had a moment previously joined the group, and who, with his accustomed gentle courtesy, was glad to pay a passing (and in this respect well-deserved) compliment to the good taste of the American ladies. 'I heard,' he added, 'before I left London, some fellows at the Travellers' talking of a Princess Dacia, and of the extraordinary beauty of her mother. One of the men, Lord Dorrington, had met them on the Italian lakes, and absolutely raved about the latter. By his account, though, she must be a rather peculiar person—a little excitable, and *brusque* in her manner, I should imagine from what he said. But as you were probably acquainted with them yourself, you can perhaps tell us if there is any truth in the description which Lord Dorrington gave of this royally magnificent personage ?'

Vinca, whose curiosity had been previously excited by what she imagined to be Mr. Scobell's unwillingness to answer questions regarding this apparently well-known lady, watched his countenance narrowly as he slowly answered :

'I had the pleasure of being slightly acquainted with Madame de Wolkersdorf and her daughter at Rome ; but as for descriptions, they, as we all know, are so apt to be coloured according to the individual tastes and imaginations of the

delineators, that they are virtually useless as regards—— But are we not behaving rather ungallantly towards the young lady who is exerting herself for our amusement? Ah!’ as a great crash of chords proclaimed that the performance was at an end, ‘bravo, Miss Rosie!’ and he clapped his hands with an appearance of such genuine enthusiasm that, had not quick-witted Vinca been occupied by other thoughts as well as duties, the notion of the American as a future ‘admirer’ for her young sister might possibly have flashed across her brain.

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